

The impact of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act
in eastern Sussex. An intra-regional study c. 1800-
1860.

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List of Abbreviations

ESRO East Sussex Record Office

OPL Old Poor Law

NPL New Poor Law

PLAA Poor Law Amendment Act

TNA The National Archives

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Abstract

This study uses poor relief records for sixteen parishes across the period 1800 to 1860 in order to assess the number and profile of relief recipients and the nature of the support they received prior to, and following, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. There have been many studies of welfare in the last decades of the Old and the first years of the New Poor Laws; however, very few have considered the realities of relief at a local level longitudinally, and virtually none have undertaken an in-depth study of the impact of change on communities during the crucial transition period. The focus of the study is eastern Sussex in the southeast of England which was a predominantly agricultural region in the nineteenth century and included areas with exceptionally high spending on poor relief. The parishes, which became part of five New Poor Law unions, are located in geographically diverse areas and represent a range of economies in the Weald, the Downs and a county town, making it possible to consider relief at an intra-regional level.

The New Poor Law aimed to impose a more deterrent relief system which would restrict the support available, notably to the able-bodied, and reduce the cost to ratepayers. In addition to making changes to the supply of poor relief, the legislation established a precedent whereby a Central Authority in London became involved with administration at a local level. This study is one of the first to discuss the interaction between local officials and the Central Commission and also the relationship between the poor and administrators at a local and central level and it identifies a strong sense of 'localism' within the parishes. The Sussex evidence reveals that spending on relief fell after 1834 and support to the able-bodied, notably agricultural labourers, was reduced. However, the impact was far greater in the wealden parishes where poverty was most apparent under the Old Poor Law. Comparisons are made with contemporary society and the study concludes that issues such as low wages, temporary employment and a failure to appreciate the range of problems faced by local economies were apparent in the nineteenth century and still prevail today.

Chapter One

Introduction

“I’ll have to choose whether to be warm or to eat.”¹ These are the words of a young woman with a family in September 2021. Poverty, exacerbated by the Covid epidemic and related issues of unemployment, has driven many people to live at, or below, subsistence levels and to rely on foodbanks to feed themselves and their families. Government measures including withdrawing the £20 Income Support uplift and increasing National Insurance, have arguably exacerbated the difficulties individuals face. This situation in twenty first century Britain suggests that as a society we are failing to deal with poverty and its causes. Rather than improve conditions for the poor, government legislation appears to be making the situation worse. In order to try to address these issues it is essential to understand past experiences of poverty and the associated canvas of welfare solutions.

Within a wide history of welfare studies there has been considerable focus on poverty in the nineteenth century and the support that was available in the form of poor relief. This period has attracted interest because of major changes to relief legislation in the form of the Poor Law Amendment Act (PLAA) of 1834 and there are arguably parallels with the present day. The PLAA was introduced by central government in order to impose greater control and uniformity on a localised relief system. The legislation aimed to cut the cost of relief to ratepayers, reduce the number of people entitled to support and restrict the form of welfare so that it became a more deterrent system. Modern governments have also expressed concern regarding the size and cost of the welfare state, while regional administrators are trying to re-establish more control over measures to deal with poverty, arguing that they have a better understanding of local issues than ministers based in London.²

It is the aim of this thesis to assess the impact of the PLAA on the poor and on officials by undertaking an in-depth study of poor relief during the years 1800 to 1860. To understand the problem of poverty in any period we need to ask questions regarding the profile of the poor and why they need support; the scale of the problem and the cost and the nature and form of

¹ *The Daily Mirror*, 7th September 2021.

² In January 2022 Liverpool Mayor, Steve Rotherham, cited a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research which calls for further devolution to give more power to local leaders who, “know their areas far better.” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/england/merseyside> (accessed on 17/01/22).

the help given. In addition, we should consider the relationship between those receiving and those administering support and ask what are government's intentions when making legislation to deal with poverty? What are the effects of legislation on the poor and on the officials who administer support, and crucially are there inter-regional or intra-regional variations in poverty and the reasons for this? The following discussion considers to what extent these questions have been addressed by other studies and identifies considerable gaps within the historiography. It then outlines how this research approaches each of the questions. The study is based on sixteen parishes in eastern Sussex and an explanation is given regarding why this is an important region to examine. A unique aspect of this work is the breadth and depth that it brings to the field. No other study has considered these issues across a period of sixty years based on a detailed analysis of sixteen different communities.

Firstly, a brief background to the PLAA is needed. The years 1800 to 1860 have been selected for study as they witnessed considerable changes in welfare support. The period includes the final three decades of the relief system prior to 1834 which is known as the Old Poor Law (OPL) and the first three decades of what has become known as the New Poor Law (NPL) following the introduction of the PLAA. Under the OPL the 'deserving poor', the elderly, disabled and children, could receive outdoor support in the form of a small cash pension and/or relief in kind such as flour, fuel or rent or they were supported indoors in a poorhouse/workhouse. Relief was administered either by an overseer at parish level, or by a local incorporation, and funded by levying a rate on householders. However, by the late-eighteenth century it was perceived that there was increasing pressure on the welfare system as able-bodied men and their families were added to the relief lists. This was a particular issue in agricultural parishes in the southeast due to factors including high food prices, poor harvests and by the early-1820s a downturn in the rural economy which often resulted in underemployment. The problems experienced by rural labourers culminated in the Swing Riots of 1831 when the rioters' grievances included low wages and meagre poor relief.

Arguably there was a lack of understanding regarding the causes of poverty amongst those in charge of making policies, the Poor Law Commissioners in London who, concerned by the rural unrest, decided to impose a more deterrent system in opposition to the call for greater support from the protesters. Under the PLAA outdoor relief was to be withdrawn from the able-bodied; their only option of support would be a deterrent workhouse. The aim of the Poor law

Commissioners was to reduce the size of the relief lists and thus cut costs to the ratepayers. They maintained that many able-bodied applicants sought relief due to idleness and that a deterrent system would solve this problem.

Clearly the new pressures on the welfare system and calls for change in the provision of poor relief during the first decades of the nineteenth century make it an important period for historians of poverty to analyse. When considering the first questions outlined above - what was the profile of relief recipients, why did they need support and what was the scale of the problem and the cost - there is consensus within the historiography that relief numbers and costs were increasing by the early-nineteenth century. There is also agreement that the profile was changing to include more able-bodied men and their families, notably agricultural labourers in the southeast. However, there is a paucity of studies which assess the scale of these changes during the final decades of the OPL. Henry French's work on the rural parish of Terling in Essex found that an increasing number of able-bodied labourers and their families were seeking support by the early-1800s and at the same time relief bills rose exponentially. Samantha Williams also found that the number of paupers and costs were 'rocketing' by this period in her microstudy of a rural and a town parish in Bedfordshire. However, the rise in labouring families on the relief lists was less marked than in French's study as there were a range of cottage industries. This highlights the problems that predominantly agricultural economies such as Terling were facing. French did not take his study beyond 1834; Williams briefly considered the impact of the PLAA during the late-1830s. This will be the first study to look at the profile of relief recipients in the same communities for several decades before and after the PLAA.³

With reference to the nature of relief and what form it took, there has been considerable debate in the historiography over whether from the point of view of the poor the OPL relief system could be described as harsh or generous and benevolent and whether this changed after 1834. Steven King has provided a full discussion of the different views which range from pessimistic to optimistic. King points out that under the OPL pensions could vary across the country but that these were also supplemented with relief in kind. He agrees with Thomas

³ H. French, 'How dependent were the "dependent poor"? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834', *Continuity and Change*, 30 (2015), 193-222; S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Suffolk: 2011), 62-63, 100.

Sokoll that the OPL system could be flexible and at times generous.⁴ Williams discussed the forms of outdoor relief provided by the overseers in Bedfordshire under the OPL and Samantha Shave has carried out a micro-study looking at the welfare packages given to eight individuals in rural Dorset, but again comparisons are not made with the NPL period. With regard to indoor support, Williams noted that there is little information on indoor support in the two Bedfordshire parishes during the OPL period and this appears to be the case more broadly within the historiography, and certainly within studies focused on the rural southeast.⁵

A further important question which this study will address is the role of relief officials and their interaction with the poor. Sokoll, Peter Jones and King have carried out vital work on correspondence between paupers and officials which provides an insight into the sentiment of relief and the approach of officials towards the poor. Jones and King argue that under the OPL a sympathetic relationship could be maintained despite increasing pressure on the relief lists in some parishes.⁶ This is in contrast to Lynn Hollen Lees' suggestion that the poor were becoming marginalised by the early-nineteenth century as the welfare lists grew.⁷ When assessing the impact of the PLAA on the poor it is essential to take into account whether their relationship with those administering relief changed. However, no attempt has been made to assess whether there was continuity in personnel between the Old and New Poor Laws. Work carried out on the composition of the new boards of guardians during the late-1830s in the southeast and the Midlands suggests that a greater distance had been placed between officials and relief recipients.⁸ Karen Rothery has discussed the more complex bureaucracy that developed locally

⁴ S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000), 259-268; T. Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London 1800-1834', *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000), 19-46.

⁵ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*; S. Shave, 'The Dependent Poor? (Re) constructing the Lives of Individuals "On the Parish" in Rural Dorset, 1800-1832', *Rural History*, 20 (2009), 67-97. Studies have been carried out into OPL workhouses in urban areas; notably A. Tomkins' work on Oxford, Shrewsbury and York in: A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester: 2006).

⁶ Studies on pauper correspondence include: Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living': P. Jones, "'I cannot keep my place without being deascent": Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the south of England, 1750-1830', *Rural History*, 21 (2009), 31-49; S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s* (London: 2019); P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England, bearing Witness* (Macmillan: 2020).

⁷ L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: 1998), 93-111.

⁸ Studies on the new boards of guardians include: A. Brundage, 'The English Poor Law of 1834 and the Cohesion of Agricultural Society', *Agricultural History*, 48, (1974), 405-417; W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Laws: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), 37-68; E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism* (Suffolk: 2007). Research by Brundage and Apfel and Dunkley indicated a harsher system where the

following the PLAA. She suggested that personalities played a role in determining intra-regional variations in administration; an important point that will be further explored in this study.⁹

Turning now to the Poor Law Commissioners' intentions when drawing up new relief legislation in 1834, and the impact of the PLAA on the poor, there is consensus within the historiography that the aim was to cut expenditure and reduce the overall number of relief recipients, in particular the able-bodied, by making it a more deterrent system. Previous studies have used government reports to assess the success of the legislation in achieving these aims.¹⁰ These sources are useful in showing trends and there is agreement that spending on relief and the number of people being supported went down after 1834.¹¹ However, there has been considerable dispute over the extent to which outdoor relief continued to be given to able-bodied men under the NPL. While the Poor Law Commissioners issued orders prohibiting this support, there were exceptions within the orders making it possible for guardians to provide outdoor payments, notably when there was illness in the family. Karel Williams has argued that the number of able-bodied men given outdoor relief was severely reduced under the NPL while Michael Rose, Anne Digby and Sarah Bradley contend that guardians were making regular exceptional relief payments.¹²

In terms of implementing a more deterrent system through the use of a workhouse in each union, there is agreement that the percentage of indoor poor remained far lower than the percentage of outdoor poor under the PLAA.¹³ A few studies have been carried out on the number and profile of workhouse inmates during the first decades of the NPL but comparisons within the same communities under the OPL have not been made.¹⁴ Margaret Crowther and Felix Driver have both considered conditions in the NPL workhouses and question whether the

guardians were keen to implement the PLAA. Hurren's work in Northamptonshire also identified a more difficult relationship between guardians and the poor as outdoor relief was administered as a 'gift' rather than a 'right'.

⁹ K. Rothery, 'The Implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire, c. 1830-1847', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016), 313-314.

¹⁰ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: 1981); A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: 1976).

¹¹ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 237.

¹² Williams, *From Pauperism*; M. Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law,' *Economic History Review*, 19 (1966), 607-620; Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law'; S. Bradley, 'Welcoming the New Poor Law: The Bromsgrove Poor Law Union, 1836-1847', *Family and Community History*, 22 (2019), 200-221.

¹³ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 237.

¹⁴ Studies on the number and profile of the indoor poor during the mid-nineteenth century include: N. Goose, 'Workhouse Populations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: the case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999), 52-69; A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, 'The Populations of Two Hampshire Workhouses, 1851-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998), 38-53.

poor experienced a harsher system after 1834.¹⁵ There is some consensus in the historiography that the psychological impact of indoor relief may have been worse than the physical conditions.¹⁶ More recent work using sources including autobiographies and pauper correspondence argues that the individual experiences of indoor paupers were in fact wide-ranging.¹⁷

Yet, if indoor numbers did not greatly increase this raises the question: how did the poor manage as spending on relief was reduced and fewer people were on the outdoor relief lists? It is not possible to fully address these issues using research based primarily on central records as they do not provide information on how relief was distributed at a local level nor how the poor made use of indoor support. Studies to date have not identified how much relief able-bodied men received in the form of exceptional payments, for example, and how it compared with their income from the welfare system under the OPL. In fact we have very little idea of the impact of the PLAA on the lives of the poor at parish level during the first decades of the NPL. The value of a study such as this one is that it can assess the scale of difference in outdoor and indoor relief numbers and also in the value of relief as a result of the PLAA.

The question regarding what impact the PLAA had on relief officials raises a key issue of localism versus centralism. The implementation of the PLAA was one of the first instances when a centralised authority in London attempted to impose a regulated system onto local officials. The contention by Digby and Rose that outdoor allowances continued during the mid-nineteenth century would suggest that the Commissioners had limited control. Philip Harling has argued that by the late-1830s the Central Authority had a modicum of authority where previously there was none. Peter Dunkley's assessment of relief under the NPL in Durham during the 1840s found that the guardians were capable of defying the Commissioners when they were faced with an economic crisis and studies of parts of Wales and Lancashire have

¹⁵ M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The history of an English social institution* (London: 1981), 269-271; F. Driver, *Power and pauperism: The workhouse system 1834-1884* (Cambridge: 1993).

¹⁶ Both Crowther and Ottaway note the psychological impact of the New Poor Law workhouses on the poor: Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 267-272; S. Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse' in Jonathan Reinarz and Leonard Schwarz (eds.), *Poverty, Medicine and the Workhouse* (Rochester: 2013), 43.

¹⁷ A. Tomkins, 'Poor Law Institutions through Working-Class Eyes: Autobiography, Emotion, and Family Context, 1834-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 60 (2021), 285-309; P. Jones, S. King, and K. Thompson, 'Clothing the New Poor Law Workhouse in the Nineteenth Century', *Rural History*, 32 (2021), 127-148.

identified officials who resisted the order to provide a deterrent workhouse until the 1870s.¹⁸ However, this will be the first study to carry out a close examination of the relationship between the NPL guardians from several unions and the Poor Law Commission, and its successor the Poor Law Board, to assess how much authority local officials retained.

The final question listed above concerns inter-regional variations in poverty. There can be little doubt that local economies across England and Wales vary widely and experience a range of problems. Inter-regional and indeed intra-regional variations in poverty levels are clearly an important issue in the twenty first century. For example, in East Sussex, which is the focus of this study, nineteen communities currently fall within the bottom ten per cent of the most deprived areas in the country while twenty-two communities fall within the top ten per cent of the most prosperous areas.¹⁹ Variations in poverty levels were also very apparent in the past and could lead to differences in the provision of welfare. King has highlighted the varying relief systems that existed in macro-regions such as the northeast or southwest during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time Steve Hindle has identified intra-regional variations between contiguous parishes during the eighteenth century.²⁰ There was a different reaction to the PLAA in the industrial north and parts of Wales compared with rural agricultural communities in the south and east.²¹ The findings from this study will indicate just how significant regional and local variations could be. Furthermore it will place Sussex within a wider south-eastern English context. King has proposed that individual relief systems can be best understood in terms of how they fit within certain welfare regimes and this research will consider whether different regimes can be identified within eastern Sussex which might have more in common with regimes in other counties.²²

¹⁸ P. Harling, 'The Power of Persuasion: Central Authority, Local Bureaucracy and the New Poor Law', *The English Historical Review*, 107 (1992), 30-53; P. Dunkley, 'The "Hungry Forties" and the New Poor Law: A Case Study', *The Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 329-346; M. Evans and P. Jones, "'A Stubborn Intractable Body": Resistance to the Workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877', *Family and Community History*, 17 (2014), 101-121.

¹⁹ *Indices of Deprivation 2019-East Sussex*, JSNA website, <http://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk> (accessed 20/11/21).

²⁰ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 259-268; S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: 2004), 283.

²¹ For example New Poor Law unions with deterrent workhouses were established more quickly in the south and east. Evans and Jones discussed the resistance to the New Poor Law in Lancashire and in particular in Wales where there was a dislike of the notion of the workhouse and individual unions employed stalling tactics: Evans and Jones, "'A Stubborn Intractable Body'".

²² S. King, 'Welfare Regimes and Welfare Regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750s to 1860s', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), 42-66.

It is clear from this brief assessment of the historiography that a number of questions regarding the impact of the PLAA remain unanswered. This thesis uses records from eastern Sussex to address these gaps. Sussex is an ideal area for a study of the nineteenth century welfare system for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are no substantial published works on poor relief in the county which is a surprising omission given that during the nineteenth century Sussex was a prime example of a predominantly rural grain growing area where relief spending was high because of seasonal unemployment.²³ Secondly, it is an ideal area for an intra-regional study due to the varied nature of the geography and associated farming conditions in the region which includes woodland in the Weald and open downland. The farms on the Downs were larger and more prosperous than those in the Weald and contemporary commentators noted that there were much higher levels of poor relief in the Weald compared with the Downs.²⁴ The size and prosperity of the farms played an important part in determining the levels of poverty in individual parishes. John Langton's work on Oxfordshire has considered the relationship between the geography and economy of a community and poor relief levels; however, there is a paucity of such studies and this research aims to help fill the gap.²⁵ The parishes chosen for this study vary in size and have different economies; they include both wealden and downland parishes and also the town of Lewes and the port of Newhaven. It is therefore possible to compare poor relief in a range of communities.²⁶ Thirdly, Sussex has particularly good extant poor relief records covering both the Old and New Poor Laws.

What follows tackles the questions outlined above by looking firstly at the number and the profile of relief recipients in the parishes during the final decades of the OPL. Comparisons are made between the parishes and also over time to assess how the relief lists changed between the end of the eighteenth century and 1834. Particular focus is given to agricultural labourers because, as already noted, farm workers with large families were becoming increasingly

²³ In 1803 Sussex had the highest expenditure per head on poor relief: A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke: 2002), 40.

²⁴ Respondents to government enquiries commented on the different relief levels in the Sussex Weald compared with the South Downs: *Report of His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws*, PP 1834, C.44, 515a; 522a; *Third report from the select committee appointed to inquire into the state of agriculture*, PP 1836, C.465, 193.

²⁵ J. Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire 1775-1832', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle upon Tyne: 2015).

²⁶ King stresses the importance of considering the total welfare package given to individuals, not just regular pensions: King, *Poverty and welfare*, 155.

prominent on the relief lists by the early-1800s, notably in the southeast and the Midlands.²⁷ The nature, value and cost of relief, both indoor and outdoor, under the OPL is discussed so that intra-regional comparisons can be made and also comparisons with the nature, value and cost of relief following the PLAA. The study employs both quantitative methods and also qualitative methods in the form of case studies of relief recipients and relief officials. The attitude of officials to, and views on, the poor are discussed. Focus is then given to the implementation of the NPL in eastern Sussex during the 1830s: who were the new guardians and how did they react to the Poor Law Commissioners' directives? How were relief numbers and relief costs affected at this initial stage of the PLAA, and to what extent was use made of a deterrent workhouse? Finally relief during the years 1840-1860 is assessed once the PLAA had become established in the southeast so that the full impact of the legislation on both relief recipients and relief officials can be measured and compared across the parishes in the longer-term. This section of the study addresses the central, but unanswered, question whether any initial changes to the relief system in the 1830s were maintained during the mid-nineteenth century.²⁸

Sources used for the study include local records available in the East Sussex Record Office (The Keep), government documents accessible via the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers database and Central Authority records kept in the National Archives. Local sources for the OPL years include overseers' accounts and vestry minutes; for the NPL years extant union ledgers, boards of guardians' minute books and workhouse admission and discharge registers have been used. Survival of records varies for each parish which is a common issue in relief studies but there is good coverage for individual parishes which represent the Downs, the Weald and the town of Lewes. The censuses between 1821 and 1861 have also been used to provide background information to population including occupation, family size and living arrangements. This level of detail is essential for a broader understanding of the range of makeshift economies employed by the poor in addition to relief which, as other studies have found, was rarely sufficient for subsistence.²⁹ Government and Central Authority sources include government reports and legislation, notably the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and

²⁷ French, 'How dependent?'

²⁸ King has questioned whether initial attempts by some officials to show strict adherence to the new guidelines were relaxed by the 1840s: S. King, 'Rights, Duties and Practice in the Transition between the Old and New Poor Laws 1820s-1860s', in *Obligation, Entitlement*, 263-291.

²⁹ Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 188-190; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 161.

attendant papers, and correspondence between the Poor Law Commission and the poor law unions in Sussex.

There are seven chapters in the study including an introductory and a concluding chapter. Chapter Two provides a historical review. Given the broad scope of this study which covers a sixty year period, the chapter is divided into four sections: the OPL period; the introduction of the NPL during the 1830s; the establishment of the NPL between 1840 and 1860; and Sussex historiography. Chapter Three covers the sources, methodology and a background to the parishes in the study. Chapter Four provides a comprehensive assessment of the welfare system in eastern Sussex during the final decades of the OPL. It is by necessity a long chapter and has therefore been sub-divided into three sections: the number and profile of relief recipients; the nature of relief; and the supply of relief. The introduction of the NPL is taken up in Chapter Five and the impact of the PLAA during the 1840s and 1850s is covered in Chapter Six. The final concluding chapter draws together the main findings from this discussion.

The scope of this thesis is ambitious and the content highly complex, but only by looking in depth at a number and range of communities is it possible to gain a greater understanding of the impact of the PLAA on the lives of parishioners. The survival of local records varies nationally and in many areas it is minimal. It is exceptional to be able to study the relief records from as many as sixteen parishes which cover both the Old and New Poor Law relief periods, which is precisely what this research is founded on. Findings from these records will show that the words of the young woman at the beginning of this discussion would have been familiar to many people in eastern Sussex two hundred years ago, both before and after the PLAA. While it is easy to blame governments in general for conditions in society and to regard the 'poor' as a homogenous group, it is hoped that this study will throw some light on the individuals who worked with the poor in a number of ways and the many people who experienced differing levels of poverty for a range of reasons. As a society to understand poverty and how to alleviate it we have to see it as a problem which affects individuals.

Chapter Two

Historiographical review

Introduction

Historiography of the Poor Laws has developed from a 'top down' approach often focusing on data from government records to include more 'localised' studies using a combination of national and local sources. More recently historians have undertaken in-depth studies by combining relief records with parish registers and also through making use of new sources such as pauper letters and autobiographies to test ideas in the literature and examine the 'experience' of receiving poor relief. The following discussion focuses on research that is pertinent to the questions raised in the Introduction and addressed by this study of eastern Sussex parishes: were there intra-regional differences in relief levels and relief practices under the OPL and, if so, what were the reasons? What impact did the PLAA have on both the poor, in particular agricultural labourers, and on relief officials in the short and longer term and to what extent were local officials able to maintain local practices?

The first section of this chapter deals with the OPL, with particular reference to the final decades. Studies of the OPL are wide-ranging and therefore the issues covered are grouped into the following themes: the extent and cause of rising relief costs and rising relief numbers in the final decades of the OPL; the nature of relief, how well the outdoor and the indoor poor were treated; inter and intra-regional variations in relief; and finally pauper agency and relations between the poor and officials. Research into the introduction of the NPL has largely focused on the composition and influence of the new boards of guardians. This second section considers the personnel on the new boards, whether they implemented a stricter regime after 1834 or whether there was continuity in relief administration. The establishment of the NPL during the 1840s and 1850s has not been extensively researched and there are notably very few studies of local records. In this third section the administration of relief and the debates concerning whether the poor experienced a harsher regime once the NPL had been established are discussed. Consideration is again given to whether paupers had any agency in changing their treatment. The section ends by questioning whether or not historians have noted any signs of a change in relief levels in rural parishes by the early 1860s. In the final section the

historiographical review assesses the very limited published research on poor relief in Sussex which touches on the OPL but not the period beyond 1837.

While it is essential to view the Sussex parishes within a regional and national context, particular focus is given to studies of agricultural parishes and rural towns in the Midlands and southeast rather than to urban and industrial areas in other regions of the country. There is some justification for focusing on these areas which experienced significant challenges in providing poor relief in the final years of the OPL and the first decades of the NPL. As Steven King has pointed out, the south and east; 'bore the brunt of the developing poverty problem from the later eighteenth century.'¹ Moreover, while there has been considerable attention in the literature to parts of the southeast, and in particular the East Midlands, there are areas which have not been covered such as eastern Sussex. This chapter considers the historiography concerning poor relief during this period and it also identifies gaps in the literature on both the Old and New Poor Laws which the Sussex study aims to fill.

2.1 The Old Poor Law

During the final decades of the eighteenth century the population of England was rising and increasing levels of poverty and heavier demands on the relief system brought debate over welfare provision into the public domain and attracted the attention of reformist politicians. Sir Frederick Eden, a social investigator, and Thomas Malthus, cleric, philosopher and economist, were among a number of commentators who were highly critical of the poor laws and published their concerns over rising relief costs. Their work formed part of a new broad movement of social commentary on welfare issues. Most of the criticism concerned outdoor relief payments to the able-bodied. Eden argued that the payment of allowances to able-bodied labourers hindered self-improvement and encouraged indolence while Malthus put the case that such payments were actually encouraging the increase in population as the labouring poor could obtain support in relation to the size of their families. Eden and Malthus were writing in the 1790s, a period of poor harvests and high wheat prices which witnessed an increase in applications for poor relief and a change in the profile of relief applicants from mainly elderly people and widows to the inclusion of able-bodied labourers and their families.

¹ S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000), 141.

It was also the decade when many feared that the revolution in France would spread to England and threaten the social order.²

Economic depression following the end of the French Wars in 1815 further exacerbated the problem of high relief costs and there was considerable support for radically reforming the system of providing poor relief. The decline in food prices and agricultural profits led some farmers and landlords to feel less certain about the relief system. However, there was also a reluctance to take such decisive action during a time of great crisis.³ Instead legislation in 1818 and 1819, the Sturges-Bourne Acts, enabled parishes to elect a Select Vestry and appoint a salaried overseer. The setting up of a Select Vestry enabled local landowners to exert their influence on the relief system as voting rights were tied to wealth and particularly land ownership. Assistant overseers could assess the character and the claims of paupers.

These acts were permissive and in fact only fifteen to twenty per cent of parishes had either a Select Vestry or an assistant overseer by the early-1830s.⁴ Moreover, disquiet over the support of able-bodied labourers continued as schemes such as the roundsman system, which involved local farmers hiring labourers and subsidising their wages from the poor rates, were increasingly employed during the agricultural depression in the 1820s. As many vestry members were also farmers this could cause resentment from other rate payers.⁵ Criticism of the relief system was very often linked to criticism of the poor themselves. However, agricultural labourers had one very vocal supporter in William Cobbett who condemned the demoralising effects of the roundsman system and argued that a fair, living wage for labourers was the best solution to poverty. Cobbett presented his case in two-penny broadsheets and at public meetings notably in south eastern counties including Sussex.⁶

Between 1830 and 1831 agricultural labourers in southern, eastern and Midland counties rose up in protest against the harsh economic conditions they faced in the countryside in a series of

² Sir F. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, ed. by A. G. Rogers (London: 1928), 94, 124-128; T. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: 1798); A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke: 2002), 25-27.

³ J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism* (London: 1969), 224.

⁴ S. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester: 2017), 136; Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 51.

⁵ G. Boyer, *An Economic History of the New Poor Law, 1750-1850* (New York: 1990), 94. Boyer's comment on ratepayers was supported by reports from the Poor Law Commissioners. However, R. Wells questions this, arguing that tenant farmers engaged in annual negotiations with landlords to set the poor rates: R. Wells, 'Poor Law Reform in the Rural South-East; the Impact of the Sturges Bourne Acts during the Agricultural Depression, 1815-1835', *Southern History*, 23 (2001), 53.

⁶ I. Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: 1992).

riots, known as the Swing Riots due to the distribution of threatening letters signed by 'Captain Swing'. Labourers, quite often supported by farmers, protested against a range of changes affecting their livelihood including enclosure, the use of new farm machinery as well as low wages and punitive poor relief. In some parishes wages were increased and the use of threshing machines ended; however, any success was short-lived as concern over social stability following the riots led to the implementation of compulsory poor law legislation in 1834. Known as the New Poor Law, the legislation did little to appease the concerns of the labourers. On the contrary the Poor Law Commissioners in charge of drawing up the Act wholeheartedly adopted the views of those commentators who had been critical of a system which provided labourers with allowances. The legislation sought to reduce costs to the ratepayer and put an end to payments of outdoor relief to the able-bodied. A stricter and more regulated relief system was to be established by grouping parishes together to share a mandatory workhouse. Relief in the workhouse would be the only option for the able-bodied; inmates were to be classified by age and sex and families separated. The concept of 'less eligibility' meant that the standard of welfare in the workhouse should be below that of the lowest paid worker. Almost one hundred years later the social investigators S. and B. Webb carried out one of the earliest assessments of the history of poor relief in which they heavily criticised the policy of 'less eligibility' under the NPL. However, they also condemned the demoralising effect of paying allowances to the able-bodied under the OPL.⁷

It was not until the 1960s that economic historians really began to question whether poor relief in the form of allowance payments was indeed responsible for the increase in population and related rise in relief levels at the end of the eighteenth century and during the early years of the nineteenth century. Mark Blaug's analysis of the bread scale devised by magistrates in Speenhamland, Berkshire, where allowances paid to families were linked to bread prices, concluded that the increased income was too modest to encourage the generation of children. Rather outdoor relief could have improved the nutrition in labourers' families and helped to reduce infant mortality rates.⁸ James Huzel found that the fertility rate actually declined during the 1820s in his comparison of two agricultural parishes on the North Downs of Kent. In the parish where relief officials adopted a strict approach and paid little outdoor relief and no

⁷ S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law Policy* (London: 1910: reprint, 1963).

⁸ M. Blaug, 'The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New', *The Journal of Economic History*, 23 (1963), 161, 171-176.

family allowances the fertility rate was higher than in the parish where allowances were paid to families. Huzel argued that surplus labour and a reduction in farmers' capital were to blame for high poor relief costs.⁹ Daniel Baugh used government surveys of annual relief spending between 1801 and 1817 to show that there was a consistency between wheat prices and per capita relief spending in the early years of the century. He argued that increases in the cost of poor relief were due to high food prices during the Napoleonic wars and unemployment in the years following the wars.¹⁰

The issue of allowance payments and population increase was re-ignited in the 1990s by George Boyer when he argued that making additional payments to large families may well have increased the population. His survey of 214 parishes from twelve counties in the southeast demonstrated that in parishes which gave allowances to the third child in a family the birth rate was twenty per cent higher than in parishes that made no such payments.¹¹ However, Samantha Williams challenged the approach of Boyer and his predecessors as very little is known about the individual recipients of relief in their studies. In her assessment of relief recipients in the Bedfordshire parishes of Campton and Shefford Williams noted that relief payments to individuals and families were generally small and supplemented other income and were therefore unlikely to have 'encouraged' couples to marry and 'breed recklessly'.¹² Henry French's study of Terling came to similar conclusions that relief payments were not a substitute for wages but rather a supplement to very low family incomes. He found that there was a marked increase in families receiving relief in Terling by the turn of the century but this was a response to economic hardship caused by high food prices and agricultural depression.¹³

Thomas Sokoll's examination of relief in the rural parish of Ardleigh, Essex, also identified a close relationship between the rise and fall of relief expenditure and the rise and fall of wheat prices between 1790 and 1830.¹⁴ The cost of wheat rose during the second half of the

⁹ J. Huzel, 'Malthus, the poor law, and population in early-nineteenth century England', *Economic History Review*, 22 (1969), 448.

¹⁰ D. Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790-1834', *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975).

¹¹ Boyer, *An Economic History*, 172.

¹² S. Williams, 'Malthus, marriage and poor law allowances revisited: a Bedfordshire case study, 1770-1834', *The Agricultural History Review*, 52 (2004), 79.

¹³ H. French, 'How dependent were the "dependent poor"? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834', *Continuity and Change*, 30 (2015), 193-222.

¹⁴ T. Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices and the Allowance Cycle: Poverty and Poor Relief in the Agricultural Community of Ardleigh 1794-1801', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: 2015), 100.

eighteenth century and remained high during the first two decades of the nineteenth century driven by a rise in demand from a growth in population. The average price of wheat per quarter was 46s. 6.5d. in 1785 but rose to 94s. 9d. in 1817. Wages were not keeping up with food costs in this period; Nathaniel Kent, a contemporary commentator from Norfolk, noted that between the 1750s and 1790s the price of provisions had risen by sixty per cent and wages by twenty five per cent.¹⁵

There is consensus amongst the post-1960 studies that poor relief spending was highest in wheat growing agricultural communities in the southeast of England. Blaug identified counties where the system of subsidising wages out of the poor rates was particularly prevalent and these included Wiltshire, Dorset, Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Suffolk and Norfolk; Huzel focused his study on Kent; Baugh on Kent, Essex and Sussex; while Boyer noted that seasonal layoffs and outdoor relief were most cost effective in, 'the grain-producing southeast.' The more recent studies of Williams and French focused on parishes in Bedfordshire and Essex.¹⁶ The disparity in relief spending between southeastern agricultural counties and other regions of the country were apparent in government surveys. Annual relief spending in 1818 at the height of rural depression totalled £331,070 in Sussex (population 233,019 in 1821) compared with £127,460 in the northern county of Chester (population 270,098 in 1821).¹⁷

Rising population and high wheat prices had a notable impact on communities where grain growing was the predominant form of agriculture because employment tended to be seasonal with peaks during spring sowing and summer harvesting. Unless people had access to alternative sources of income they were likely to turn to the relief system. The problem of seasonal unemployment was raised in the government questionnaires sent to rural parishes in 1832. Nigel Goose noted that in Hertfordshire all but one of the responses referred to far higher unemployment in the winter.¹⁸ Moreover, seasonal unemployment could affect not only male labourers but women and also children who often made a bigger contribution than

¹⁵ J. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832: A Study of the Government of England Before the Reform Bill* (Guernsey: 1911), 111.

¹⁶ Blaug 'The Myth'; Huzel, 'Malthus'; Baugh 'The Cost'; Boyer *An Economic History*; Williams, 'Malthus, marriage'; French, 'How dependent?'

¹⁷ *Abstract of Money levied and expended for Relief of the Poor in England and Wales*, PP 1827-1828, C.78.

¹⁸ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws*, PP 1834, C.44; N. Goose (ed.), *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield: 2007), 364-65.

women.¹⁹ Keith Snell discussed the reduction in women's work in the agricultural southeast by the early-nineteenth century. He argued that women's employment was increasingly concentrated on spring weeding and they had less involvement in summer harvesting as a result of competition from unemployed men. Snell's findings have been challenged by Peter King who noted that women continued to be involved in harvest time as they gleaned the grain once the crops had been cut; this activity formed a vital part of their income. Pamela Sharpe has also argued that the situation was more nuanced than Snell claims as there were considerable intra-regional variations. She contends that the range of women's work changed little between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁰

A further cause of seasonal unemployment has been posited by Blaug who argued that the practice of boarding young unmarried farm workers had given way to hiring day labourers in the south by the nineteenth century. However, regional and indeed intra-regional variations need to be taken into account. Within the county of Sussex, the focus for this study, Brian Short has argued that in the Weald the practice of in-service continued well into the mid-nineteenth century. This trend was less apparent on the Downs or the coastal plain of Sussex, although there were still examples of live-in servants for example in Glynde, Telscombe and West Firle, parishes close to the Downs. Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé cite the conversion of pasture to arable land as a key reason for the reduction of in-service. Farmers wished to profit from higher grain prices and it became cheaper to hire labour by the day and by the season than to support labourers permanently in the farmers' homes. While there was some increase in arable farming in the Weald, there was still a need for husbandmen which might explain the intra-regional differences. Nevertheless, despite the continuation of in-service in some parishes, there certainly was a decline noted in the responses to the 1832 Poor Law Enquiries. Moreover, Snell argued that a reduction in farm service also contributed to a deterioration in social relations as physical proximity and mutual toleration were lost.²¹

¹⁹ S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male-Breadwinner Family, 1790-1867', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 89-117.

²⁰ K. Snell, 'Agricultural Seasonal Unemployment, the Standard of Living, and Women's Work in the South and East, 1690-1860', *The Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), 407-437; P. King, 'Customary Rights and Women's Earnings: The Importance of Gleaning to the Rural Labouring Poor, 1750-1850', *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991), 461-476; P. Sharpe, 'The female labour market in English agriculture during the Industrial Revolution: expansion or contraction?', *The Agricultural History Review*, 47 (1999), 161-181.

²¹ Blaug, 'The Myth', 171; B. Short, 'The Decline of Living-In Servants in the transition to capitalist farming: a critique of the Sussex evidence', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 122, (1984), 147-164; E. Hobsbawm and G.

The development of farming technology has also been cited in the literature as exacerbating problems of underemployment in grain growing areas by the early-nineteenth century. Snell suggested that the replacement of sickles by heavier scythes was one of the reasons why women became less involved in harvest work although Sharpe again warned of the need to consider regional differences as Essex farm accounts referred to the continued use of both sickles and scythes during the nineteenth century.²² Probably more important was the introduction of the threshing machine as we know from examples of machine breaking that this was one of the concerns of the Swing rioters. The use of machines increased during the French Wars when there was a labour shortage. Hobsbawm and Rudé noted that as smaller, more mobile machines were developed it was possible for tenant farmers to invest in them. Farmers were keen to adopt new technology that would enable them to speed up the harvest so that they could benefit from pre-harvest peak prices in grain.²³

In addition to insecure employment, the enclosure of land has been linked to increased poverty levels in southeastern agricultural regions. Boyer noted that rising wheat prices during the second half of the eighteenth century led to much open land, commons and waste being taken into private ownership. In areas such as East Anglia and the South Midlands this practice occurred post-1750. In the southeast it took place before 1750, although there was still marginal land available that could be enclosed for growing more grain during the early-nineteenth century.²⁴ Enclosure could lead to the proletarianisation of labourers meaning that they became dependent on wage labour and it could cause immiseration as they lost access to free resources such as fuel or wild food. There has been some debate over its impact in the historiography: Larry Patriquin argued that it was a vital stage in the development of a capitalist society as labourers became separated from their means of production; but others commented that even before enclosure agricultural labourers rarely had common rights to graze livestock which might have enabled them to maintain an element of self-sufficiency.²⁵ However, there is

Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Farnham: 1969), 44; K. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England* (Cambridge: 1985), 101.

²² Snell, 'Agricultural Seasonal Unemployment', 425; Sharpe, 'The female labour market', 170.

²³ Snell, *Annals*, 222; Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, 359-362.

²⁴ Boyer, *An Economic History*, 32.

²⁵ Patriquin made the case that enclosure had a major impact on social relations as it led to the dissolution of the bond between individuals and the land as the majority of the population became labourers, losing their customary rights while landowners were driven to make a profit, often reducing wages in a capitalist economy of 'boom and bust': L. Patriquin, 'The Agrarian Origins of the Industrial Revolution in England', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 36, (2004), 196-216. Both J. Neeson and L. Shaw-Taylor suggested that labourers had minimal access to

little disagreement that the loss of resources caused increased poverty among the rural poor. Snell drew a direct correlation between enclosure and increased poor relief expenditure, while Jeanette Neeson referred to the damaging effects on customary expectations and mutual obligations in rural society as people lost shared access to local resources.²⁶

While there is wide agreement in the historiography that poor relief levels were rising by the early-nineteenth century, there is some dispute regarding whether the provision of relief was generous or meagre during the final decades of the OPL. In many parishes more money was being spent on relief but it was being given to an increasing number of people. In his assessment of a range of historians' perspectives on the character and role of both the Old and New Poor Laws, King referred to a 'welfare debate' which reflects a spectrum from positive to pessimistic interpretations. Whilst acknowledging that the term generosity is difficult to define, King suggested that it can be used as shorthand for; 'the value of allowances in relation to broadly defined background levels of living standards amongst the wider population.'²⁷ The discussion will now move on to consider the value of relief and how the poor were regarded more broadly and how they were treated by local officials. Outdoor relief and indoor relief will be covered separately.

Under the OPL outdoor relief took a number of forms including regular cash pensions to the elderly or infirm; either regular or temporary help with rent; payments in kind including clothes, fuel, flour and medical help and the placing of children in households. By the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth centuries there was an increase in support given to families as well as the elderly and infirm. As the profile of relief recipients altered, King noted a change in the relative payments of regular cash pensions and irregular payments in cash and kind. Proportionately more relief was given in kind and in particular in medical support including doctor's bills, nursing, funeral costs and additional fuel and food for illness.²⁸ The amount given in regular cash pensions did not vary greatly over this period averaging between 1s. 6d. and 3s.; in fact Richard Smith has suggested that as the number of relief pensions grew there was a

common rights: J. Neeson, *Commoners' common rights, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: 1993); L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and the Emergence of an English Agricultural Proletariat', *Journal of Economic History*, 61, (2001).

²⁶ Snell, *Annals*, 195; Neeson, *Commoners' Common Rights*, 326

²⁷ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 55; S. King, 'Welfare Regimes and Welfare Regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750s to 1960s,' *Journal of Modern European History*, 9, (2011), 42-66.

²⁸ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 156-157.

decline in their real value particularly as prices rose by the end of the eighteenth century.²⁹ Indeed it is not possible to gauge an accurate assessment of pension values without taking into account the impact of inflation or deflation. Unfortunately, studies of poor relief payments rarely take this into account.³⁰

David Thomson's study of Bedfordshire parishes identified reasonably generous allowances given to the elderly; payments in the final decades of the OPL and the first decades of the NPL were equivalent to between seventy per cent and ninety per cent of the income of young adults in the community. Snell agreed with Thomson that those aged over sixty generally benefited from the relief system, both from outdoor payments and also from care offered in many of the parish workhouses, although he noted that indoor relief was only occasionally given to older people. Lynn Hollen Lees has identified a gendered element and noted that female-headed households and elderly women tended to be well treated and given regular pensions. However, Smith questions this positive view of older women, arguing that there was a substantial decline in their well-being in southern agrarian economies. They often had to resort to the workhouse in their final years due to the cost of supporting their declining health. Goose contends that by the end of the OPL outdoor relief was given more grudgingly to men and certainly under the NPL a harsher attitude was shown towards elderly men who were disproportionately given indoor relief notably in agricultural areas.³¹

The above discussion suggests that when considering the treatment of the poor under the OPL there has been a bias in studies towards the elderly. Yet a number of in-depth studies of just one or two parishes have contributed to our understanding of how a range of parishioners experienced support. Such micro-histories can take a number of forms. Family reconstitutions were pioneered by Louis Henry in France and Edward Wrigley in England; they involve linking life events recorded in registers of baptisms, marriages and burials. In 1996 Barry Reay linked family reconstitutions to other historical records including tithes, censuses, poor relief and

²⁹ R. Smith, 'Ageing and well-being in early modern England: pension trends and gender preferences under the English Old Poor Law c.1650-1800', in P. Johnson and P. Thane (eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London: 1998), 84.

³⁰ This study will make use of C. Feinstien's tables to allow for inflation/deflation when considering relief payments in Chapter Four.

³¹ D. Thomson, 'The Welfare of the Elderly in the Past: A Family or Community Responsibility?', in M. Pelling and R. Smith (eds.), *Life, Death and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives* (London: 1991), 204; Snell, *Annals*, 105-106; L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* Cambridge: 1998), 57; R. Smith, 'Ageing and well-being'; N. Goose, 'Poverty, old age and gender in nineteenth-century England: the case of Hertfordshire', *Continuity and Change*, 20, (2005), 351-384.

charities which he called 'total reconstitution'. He applied this approach to a study of three adjacent parishes in Kent between 1800 and 1930. By adopting this method it is possible to gain an understanding of the day to day experience of a range of people in a community. However, as Reay stressed, this form of research does far more as; 'the local becomes the site for the consideration of much wider issues.'³²

Barry Stapleton has made use of the micro-study approach to examine inherited poverty and life-cycle poverty in the market town of Odiham, Hampshire. His research was based primarily on charity records as not all of the overseers' accounts have survived for the parish. Stapleton questioned whether individuals received relief occasionally or over a sustained length of time and identified cases of life-cycle poverty, notably for men when they had young children and again when they reached old age. Interestingly the study found that couples without children and families with only one or two children often accessed support contrary to the arguments of Malthus and subsequently Boyer. Stapleton concluded that many people on very low wages lived so close to subsistence that any change in family circumstances such as the birth of a child or loss of the wife's earnings could push people into poverty.³³

French questioned how dependent the poor became on relief in Terling and concluded that it became an increasingly important income supplement. A number of measures were adopted to help cope with increasing relief costs such as providing flour as well as, or instead of, cash payments and restricting gleaning to poor families and widows. For the ratepayers in Terling increased relief payments were preferable to permanent wage increases. Reference to ratepayers is important as the historiography has focused on relief recipients rather than the people who supplied the funding and support.³⁴ Williams discussed ratepayers in the town of Shefford in her Bedfordshire study where the rate base broadened during the beginning of the nineteenth century to include less well-off inhabitants. However, there is a need for further work on this aspect of poor relief.

There can be problems with a micro-study approach which looks at relief over time in a parish as individuals can easily become lost from the records. Society was extremely mobile during the

³² B. Reay, *Microhistories: demography, society and culture in rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge: 1996), xxii.

³³ B. Stapleton, 'Inherited Poverty and Life-Cycle Poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650-1850,' *Social History*, 18, (1993), 339-355.

³⁴ French, 'How dependent?', 193-222; S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Suffolk: 2011).

late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Not all relief recipients were resident in their parish of settlement but could still be supported by that parish and of course there was the ever-present problem of shared surnames and illegible writing in the sources. Samantha Shave's use of family reconstitution combined with relief records has avoided at least some of these pitfalls by examining the experience of just eight individuals in the rural parish of Motcombe in Dorset during the final decades of the OPL. Like Stapleton, Shave identified individuals who received relief on a fairly permanent basis and others who moved in and out of the welfare system; support was tailored toward the needs of the individual. A number of historians have noted the flexibility of the OPL system compared with the NPL.³⁵

Flexibility and individual treatment of the poor have been cited by those who refute the suggestion that the poor were becoming marginalised by the early-nineteenth century. Hollen Lees considered how the poor were viewed and represented in contemporary society and suggested that the term 'pauper' was used to express condemnation and moral superiority. She described both the Old and New Poor Laws as residualist meaning that state support was kept to a minimum. In that sense the attitude towards the poor could be seen as harsh. However, King argued that while the relief system was residualist, it was also flexible and expanded to accommodate the broadening composition of relief recipients.³⁶ King used correspondence between paupers and officials to look beyond the statistics recorded in overseers' records and examine individual experiences. He found that although officials had to deal with far more applicants during the final decades of the OPL they were still able to demonstrate compassion and at times generosity. The poor managed to retain a purchase on their communities rather than being pushed to the margin. Sokoll agreed that the relief system could still be both flexible and generous during the last stages of the OPL. In Ardleigh, Essex, the overseers responded to individual circumstances in a quick, pragmatic and apparently understanding manner.³⁷

This discussion of the supply of relief under the OPL has so far focused on outdoor relief; however, the poor were also given indoor relief and this support needs to be considered when

³⁵ S. Shave, 'The Dependent Poor? (Re) constructing the Lives of Individuals "On the Parish" in Rural Dorset, 1800-1832', *Rural History*, 20, (2009), 67-97. For a discussion of historians' views on a flexible Old Poor Law system see King, *Poverty and welfare*, 52.

³⁶ Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 93-111; King, *Poverty and welfare*, 175.

³⁷ S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s* (London: 2019), 247, 350; Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices'.

assessing relief regimes. Here, wording can be problematic as contemporaries used a range of terms including 'poor house', 'workhouse', 'almshouse', 'house of industry' or even 'hospital' when referring to the same establishment.³⁸ The Poor Law of 1601 identified the need for places where 'poor impotent people' could live and subsequently many parishes provided houses or cottages for some of the most vulnerable parishioners. A number of workhouses were also built which could vary in size from accommodating fewer than twenty people to several hundred, notably in metropolitan areas. Parishes might have either poor houses and or a workhouse while under legislation in the eighteenth century they could combine to share a workhouse. As the different terminology suggests, these establishments could be used for a variety of functions including organising work for inmates and for non-residents, offering care to the sick or just providing accommodation. The indoor poor in some places were the more costly paupers, notably the elderly, impotent and children, but other parishes housed a significant number of able-bodied, working-age paupers.³⁹

By the late-eighteenth century there was a growing disillusionment with workhouses for a number of reasons. One of the purposes of indoor relief had been to provide profitable work for the poor but this had proved unsuccessful as the inmates were often either not capable or not motivated to work profitably. The high cost of institutional support had become a key concern. The returns to the government's survey on poor relief in 1803 revealed that the national average expenditure on indoor paupers was £12 3s. 7d. compared with £3 3s. 8d. on outdoor paupers.⁴⁰ Attempts were made to reduce workhouse populations; Gilbert's Act in 1782 advised that the able-bodied should be given outdoor relief. Yet the rise in poverty in the first decades of the nineteenth century meant that for many parishes the workhouse continued to be an option when faced with growing numbers of applicants for relief.

Given the diversity of indoor provision under the OPL, it is not surprising that there are examples of good and bad practice and positive and negative experiences of relief in workhouses under the OPL cited in the literature. When preparing new legislation in 1782, Thomas Gilbert discussed the very varied nature of indoor relief as he identified establishments

³⁸ S. King, 'Poverty, Medicine and the workhouse in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, an afterword', in J. Reinartz and L. Schwarz (eds.), *Poverty, Medicine and the Workhouse* (Rochester: 2013), 231.

³⁹ A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester: 2006), 43-46.

⁴⁰ Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, 189.

which had been very successful and others which were 'dens of horror'.⁴¹ Alannah Tomkins has argued that while not exactly comfortable, the foundations such as those in Oxford, Shrewsbury and York were not the repositories of squalor depicted by some contemporaries.⁴² Anne Digby's discussion of workhouses in East Anglia provides a good example of how they could be both praised and condemned. During the eighteenth century a number of 'Houses of Industry' were built in Norfolk replacing what were often dilapidated parish poor houses. These were imposing buildings which included hospital care, infirmaries and workshops. Digby suggested that the physical conditions could be relatively comfortable compared with the poor houses that they replaced. However, whilst acknowledging the material superiority of the buildings, the Norfolk poet George Crabbe described them as psychologically oppressive 'prisons'.⁴³ Susannah Ottaway has also referred to the psychological fear of workhouses felt by the elderly when she concluded that while only a minority of old people went into workhouses, 'the presence of the workhouse would have figured significantly in the lives and imaginations of the aged poor.'⁴⁴ In their recent work on workhouse reform in Mid-Victorian England, Jones and King argue that, 'the template for the deterrent Victorian workhouse was established well before 1834.' They cite the opening of the workhouse in Southwell, Nottinghamshire, in the 1820s where many of the precepts of the NPL workhouse were put into in operation.⁴⁵

Jones, King and others are using new sources which throw light on individual experiences of workhouse life and demonstrate a far more nuanced picture. Ottaway's examination of a Master's Query Book in the mid-eighteenth century revealed that poor law officials closely monitored conditions in the workhouse while inmates demonstrated agency through resisting rules that restricted their freedoms. Tomkins' study of five autobiographies of individuals who spent varying lengths of time in a workhouse before 1834 found that the authors expressed positive feelings towards staff and some regarded indoor relief as a refuge from difficult living conditions. John Saville, an apprentice, found the workhouse was a welcome break from a harsh master. However, memories of events are not always accurate and Tomkins warns that the authors of the autobiographies may have presented a positive view as they would not wish

⁴¹ Shave, *Pauper Policies*, 57-58.

⁴² Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty*, 71.

⁴³ A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London: 1978), 2.

⁴⁴ S. Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse' in *Poverty, Medicine and the Workhouse*, 43.

⁴⁵ P. Jones, and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England: Bearing Witness* (London: 2020).

to be corrupted by association with workhouses, given the negative view of the institutions by the late-Victorian period.⁴⁶

Clearly the workhouse was an important component of relief provision for many parishes under the OPL and it often formed part of a package which could be quite flexible. A number of paupers experienced a combination of both indoor and outdoor relief during some stage in their lives. Moreover, it is important to remember that many poor people never turned to the relief system and that even those who did rarely saw it as their sole means of subsistence. In-depth studies of parishes can provide an important insight into the range of subsistence measures that people utilised. This theme was explored in a compilation of studies published in 2003 entitled *The Poor in England 1700-1859; An economy of makeshifts*. The work was edited by King and Tomkins and considered the wide range of support mechanisms accessed by the poor including kinship, charity, common rights, pawning items and even crime.⁴⁷ Again the range of makeshift opportunities would have been linked to life cycle stages and it would have varied in different parishes. It is to regional variations that this discussion will now turn.

King's study of poverty and welfare published in 2000 marked a significant development in the historiography as he identified the importance of regional differences. Thus, while he argued that relief in the south and east of England was, 'potentially generous, benevolent and wide-ranging', he noted a very different system in the north and west of England where relief could be meagre and uncertain and the approach of the officials could be harsh. There was a difference in the culture between these two macro-regions whereby people were more self-reliant and used to 'making do' in the north and west. King has further developed his study of regional welfare through his collaborative work with European colleagues on poor relief in modern Europe. He suggested a framework which could be used by historians to compare welfare regimes. Poor relief systems could be measured against yardsticks based on the sentiment of providers and the experience of recipients and grouped into regime 'types'. This approach could enable historians to identify welfare patterns in Europe despite the intra-regional and micro-level variations in poor relief that existed in most European countries. King gave examples of four regime types which could be applicable to England: Entitling regimes,

⁴⁶ S. Ottaway, "'A Very Bad Presidente in the House": Workhouse Masters, Care, and Discipline in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', *Journal of Social History*, 54 (2021), 1091-1119; A. Tomkins, 'Workhouse Medical Care from Working-Class Autobiographies, 1750-1834', in *Poverty, Medicine and the Workhouse*, 86-98.

⁴⁷ A. Tomkins and S. King, (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester: 2003).

Exclusionist regimes, Obligatory regimes and Disciplinary regimes. Placing parishes within one of these types can provide a more nuanced view of regions. Thus the industrial north west of England could have had parishes which represented all four of King's examples for England but it is likely to have had a critical mass in favour of one type of regime.⁴⁸

On the other hand Steve Hindle has suggested that the picture of regionally differentiated poor law administration has been significantly overdrawn. His study of contiguous parishes reveals, 'mosaics of local variation.' Each parish has a different social and economic structure resulting in variations in the liability for paying poor rates and in demand for relief based on the individual economic circumstances of each household.⁴⁹ Hindle was writing about the OPL between 1550 and 1750; yet the point he makes about the profile of ratepayers and households would still apply in the later years of the OPL. Arguably attempts to identify broader regional patterns in welfare regimes should not be viewed in opposition to in-depth studies of close-lying parishes; rather the two should be complementary. It is only by carrying out micro-studies of parishes that we can gain a better understanding of the sentiment behind relief giving and the experience of the poor. At the same time it is important to look outwards to compare parishes regionally and nationally and focusing on typologies could be a way of doing this.

While this study focuses on the poor in the agricultural southeast rather than on urban or industrial areas, some of the parishes in the study were small towns and therefore one important consideration is how relief compared between a town and a rural village. Williams has made an important contribution towards our understanding of this type of intra-regional difference by comparing a rural and town parish in her Bedfordshire study. She found that the rural parish of Campton relieved more people and spent more on relief than the town parish of Shefford, although spending per pauper was similar in the two parishes. The wider range of employment opportunities in the town may have helped people to avoid turning to the relief system. Williams also identified a higher number of occasional recipients in Shefford. In both parishes the number of people on the relief lists between 1800 and 1830 grew and although

⁴⁸ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 259, 268; S. King, 'Welfare Regimes and Welfare Regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750s to 1860s', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), 42-66.

⁴⁹ S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: 2004), 283.

poor relief was rarely the only form of subsistence, it became an increasingly important part of the economy of the poor.⁵⁰

Clearly, as Williams has demonstrated, the local economy and social structure of each parish had an influence on levels of relief and on the range of support available to the poor. The personality, background and attitude of individual relief officials would have also affected the level and type of support offered in each parish. It is quite likely that officials would have had much in common. Studies are needed to confirm whether in rural parishes or in urban parishes overseers and vestry members came from similar backgrounds and more detailed comparative work is required to assess their daily treatment of relief requests and how they coped in times of crisis. Shave has identified connections between officials in adjacent parishes and also parishes one hundred miles apart. By looking at policies between 1780 and 1850, including those that developed from Gilbert's Act and Sturges Bourne's reforms, Shave argued that officials shared practices through correspondence, visits and access to pamphlets such as *The Compleat Parish-Officer*. Ideas, notably on workhouses, could also be spread through the engagement of contractors to run these institutions. Shave suggested that rather than a regional or national picture of poor relief there were, 'islands of parishes dotted throughout England that were providing relief in similar ways.'⁵¹

This focus on relief officials is relatively new in the historiography and is an area which demands more attention. Two studies of the 'middle class' and 'middling sort' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries suggested that there was a growing number of tradesmen, business men and farmers who were becoming involved in local administrative roles including poor relief. Margaret Hunt defined 'middling' people as those broadly in receipt of an income between £80 and £150 while Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall considered 'smaller farmers', those with under 300 acres, to have been 'middle class'. Both studies noted that there tended to be more people within the middling ranks of society in towns than in rural parishes, which could be significant when considering the make-up of vestries. Joan Kent has discussed how occasions when men of similar status with horizontal ties were able to join together helped to

⁵⁰ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*.

⁵¹ Shave, *Pauper Policies*, 150-165, 182, 250.

shape a 'middling identity'. Attendance at a vestry may have been one such occasion.⁵² The final section of this review of the OPL literature will consider how steps are being made to remedy the gap in our knowledge about relief officials through the study of pauper and official correspondence.

Advances in the study of the 'experience' of being poor have been made in recent years as historians have been working with new sources, including written relief requests sent by the poor to overseers, and correspondence between overseers. While acknowledging that identifying the authorship of pauper letters can be complex, historians agree that these letters are a very important source as they can give a 'voice' to paupers and poor law officials. Sokoll made use of a collection of pauper letters found in the archives of Essex poor law administrators to examine the survival strategies of the labouring poor. He found that correspondence between the poor and relief officials demonstrates a level of 'negotiation' indicating that the poor could have some agency when requesting relief.⁵³ King and Jones traced changes in the style of pauper correspondence from formal petitions to the letter form more often used by the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth century. They agreed with Sokoll that the poor had a degree of agency when asking for relief. Significantly, the change in style from the more formal petition to the informal pauper letter suggests an easier and more familiar relationship between parish officials and the majority of parishioners.⁵⁴

The value of correspondence between paupers and officials as a primary source has been powerfully demonstrated in King's recently published work, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750s-1830s*. King used a corpus of 25,652 items from approximately 1,500 sending communities and 559 receiving communities. The letters included those written by the poor, on behalf of the poor and by officials to the poor and to one another. Obtaining poor relief was a process of negotiation rarely apparent in overseers' records as they generally only show the end stage of an application. King argued that through writing letters which were given consideration and attention by parish officers the poor gained a mutually agreed agency. This

⁵² L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: 1987); M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England* (London: 1996); J. Kent, 'The rural "middling sort" in early modern England, circa 1640-1740; some economic, political and socio-cultural characteristics', *Rural History*, 10 (1999), 42.

⁵³ T. Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London 1800-1834', *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000), 19-46.

⁵⁴ P. Jones and S. King, 'From Petition to Pauper Letter: The Development of an Epistolary Form' in *Obligation, Entitlement*, 53-77.

was apparent during the final decades of the OPL which have been seen by both contemporaries and historians as a period of 'crisis' for the poor. Moreover, responses from officials indicate that they were not simply motivated by blind economy and by the need to control the rates. There were examples of overseers giving 'extra' and wishing the applicant well which suggests that the poor had not lost legitimacy in the eyes of their community. King has also found examples from the vestry records of the poor and officials communicating in a similar way when they met in person.⁵⁵ This work on pauper correspondence is an important reminder that there were many varied experiences of poor relief dependent on both the individuals in receipt of relief and those supplying support at parish level. Such localism was to be challenged in 1834 as Commissioners in London wished to impose a more regulated system through the Poor Law Amendment Act. It is to this period that the discussion of the historiography will now turn.

2.2 The introduction of the New Poor Law

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act aimed to introduce a stricter system of poor relief notably in the rural southeast where the Swing Riots had raised concerns regarding the stability of social relations. The legislation was also designed to implement a more uniform system of relief throughout England and Wales. The first move towards centralising control at a local level was the grouping of parishes into unions. Each parish was represented by one or two guardians who met as a board with a chairman, paid clerk and ex-officio guardians who were often magistrates. Decisions regarding relief policy throughout the union would be made by a board of guardians rather than a local overseer. When considering the introduction of the PLAA and whether it imposed a stricter more coherent system, the historiography has tended to focus on the composition of the new boards of guardians and their relationship with the poor.

There is some consensus that in rural areas relations between labourers and their employers, who were often administering relief, had deteriorated by the mid-1830s when the new legislation was being implemented. In 1830 when the Swing Riots took place, there was evidence of a level of support for agricultural labourers from farmers, magistrates and some landowners. Jones viewed the protests as an attempt by agricultural labourers to retain their traditional relationship with their employers. He described a 'moral economy' whereby

⁵⁵ King, *Writing the Lives*.

labourers had an entitlement to subsistence.⁵⁶ Carl Griffin agreed that a broad-based coalition between labourers, artisans and farmers was achieved during the Swing Riots. However, while labourers managed to obtain an increase in wages in some areas and threshing machines were no longer in general use, Griffin noted that farmers later backtracked on agreements made in 1830. Further protests, this time against the NPL in the mid-1830s, reflected a fracturing of social relations.⁵⁷

Arguably the New Poor Law Commissioners aimed to address deteriorating relations between rural workers and their employers by stricter control rather than a return to paternalism. Farmers and landowners had an opportunity to control social relations through their position on the new boards of guardians and through the implementation of harsher relief measures, notably replacing outdoor relief to the able-bodied with indoor relief in larger, regularised workhouses. Whether they did so has attracted considerable attention in the historiography. Unfortunately localised studies of the composition of the new boards of guardians have not discussed whether the boards included vestry members who were active under the OPL. Identifying both vestry members in the final years of the OPL and personnel on the new boards of guardians is key to understanding whether regional practices and differences were maintained following the implementation of the PLAA. Nevertheless studies that have been carried out on the make-up and influence of the new boards of guardians have provided interesting information regarding the influence of landowners, certainly during the initial implementation of the new legislation. The historiography has approached this issue from a micro-perspective, but there is some consistency in the findings of the available studies for the southeast and the Midlands.

Thus, Brundage found that local magnates held power on the new boards of guardians in Northamptonshire. The result of transferring control from parish overseers to the guardians was a stricter regime and a decrease in spending on relief. Savings in expenditure were largely made by reducing the amount of relief given to individuals, although outdoor relief was maintained for the majority of able-bodied men. Professional personnel, often with a military background, were appointed as workhouse staff and relieving officers. Brundage acknowledged

⁵⁶ P. Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland and rural social relations: the "moral economy" of the English crowd in the nineteenth century', *Social History*, 54 (2009), 271-290.

⁵⁷ C. Griffin, *The Rural War: Captain Swing and the Politics of Protest* (Manchester: 2012).

that the situation in Northamptonshire may not have been representative of other regions as the rural Midlands had a relatively large number of resident peers and gentry and it was this form of social structure which the NPL was designed for.⁵⁸

Peter Mandler regarded the implementation of the NPL as marking a 'remaking of the country gentry' which he described as men with expanding agricultural fortunes large enough to make them county leaders who also had a growing political involvement. After the war in 1815 many of these country gentry adopted a harsher sentiment towards poor relief. Well before the PLAA there was support for a stricter relief system often imposed via Select Vestries and paid officials. Following the NPL members of the gentry were influential as chairmen of the boards of guardians. Byung Song's study of Oxfordshire also identified the involvement on the boards of a class of gentry who were not aristocrats but were wealthy and influential landowners. As both landlords and often justices of the peace they could control labour mobility to their own advantage through the issue of removal and settlement orders. When the NPL unions were formed they shared similar boundaries to the petty sessional divisions; the gentry were therefore able to maintain local control and self-interest.⁵⁹

Brundage has argued that increasing involvement of landowners on the boards of guardians reflected discontinuity between the Old and New Poor Laws as decision making was removed from overseers and individual magistrates. William Apfel and Peter Dunkley also maintained that there was discontinuity following the introduction of the NPL in Bedfordshire. They described an increasingly adversarial relationship between the landowners and farmers on the boards and the able-bodied poor. The new guardians were keen to build large, deterrent workhouses, outdoor relief to the able-bodied male labourers was minimal and often their only relief option was the workhouse. Apfel and Dunkley's work suggests that the 'moral economy' described by Peter Jones was moribund in Bedfordshire following the NPL. Employers were more concerned with their property interests and the interests of ratepayers than the customary rights of labourers to subsistence and relief. Williams' Bedfordshire study supports Apfel and Dunkley's assertions that relief expenditure was severely cut in that county following

⁵⁸ A. Brundage, 'The English Poor Law of 1834 and the Cohesion of Agricultural Society,' *Agricultural History*, 48, (1974), 405-417.

⁵⁹ P. Mandler, 'The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus', *Past and Present*, 117 (1987), 131-157; B. Song, 'Landed Interest, Local Government, and the Labour Market in England, 1750-1850', *Economic History Review*, 51, (1998), 465-488.

the NPL. She found that relief costs were halved after 1834 and concluded that, 'The New Poor Law must surely be seen as a radical discontinuity in poor relief provision.'⁶⁰

Elizabeth Hurren has challenged the view that the NPL led to discontinuity in the personnel managing poor relief. She considered the new Brixworth Union in Northamptonshire where power rested with the nobility on the new board of guardians. Hurren argued that this represented continuity as wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of a few landed families on the eve of the NPL. Landowners as guardians (or with their tenants standing in for them) were able to maintain some grip on social relations by reviving notions of paternalism in the form of gifts in kind. On the other hand Hurren described a, 'harsh change' in poor law practice as outdoor relief was administered as a 'gift' when it had previously been regarded as a parish birthright.⁶¹

Other historians have argued that the dominance of the landed gentry on the new boards of guardians in the mid-1830s was only temporary. Digby's work on the parishes in East Anglia has found that the landed gentry in Norfolk only took an active interest in the NPL during the initial stages when union boundaries were being drawn up. Following that stage their agents and more commonly their tenant farmers controlled the boards of guardians. She concludes that there was strong continuity in relief provision before and after 1834.⁶² More recently King has analysed a range of sources for parishes in the East Midlands which indicate that while there were examples of significant change in poor relief sentiment and practice immediately following the NPL, this in part reflected attempts by local officials to get to grips with the new legislation and proved in many cases to be only temporary. For example, in the Northamptonshire union of Brackley there was an initial tightening of policy in areas such as medical outdoor relief in the mid-1830s. However, this did not last; by 1838 the guardians began to reinstate medical relief and indeed reverted to some OPL practices. King argues that

⁶⁰ W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Laws: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), 37-68; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 68.

⁶¹ E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism, Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge: 2007), 91-103; Mandler, 'The Making of the New Poor Law', 155.

⁶² A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century' in D. Fraser, (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: 1976).

variations in local practices persisted under the NPL. Both Digby and King question the success of the NPL legislators in changing local practices and establishing a uniform relief system.⁶³

King's work highlights the need for localised studies which encompass both the final decades of the OPL and the first decades of the NPL to address questions regarding the identity of relief officials and whether or not there was continuity in the administration of poor relief in the short and long-term. To date there is still a paucity of in-depth studies covering this period of transition and a concentration of studies on the East Midlands. Having looked at the historiography concerning these issues during the introduction of the NPL, this discussion will now consider how the historiography has dealt with the 1840s and 1850s once the new legislation had become embedded in areas such as the southeast.

2.3 The establishment of the New Poor Law in the 1840s-1860s

This section will consider outdoor and indoor relief under the NPL once the legislation had become established; and the administration of relief by local guardians as they adjusted to a new relationship with a centralised authority. It will also question whether there was a change in the demand for relief in rural areas by the late-1850s/early-1860s. Historians have generally assessed the NPL by studying government reports, which were produced with considerable regularity after 1834, and a few studies have considered relief provision at county or union level with more emphasis on indoor relief. However, King's comment in 2000 that, 'key components of the necessary historiography are missing,' notably studies of the outdoor poor and welfare packages, largely remains the case today.⁶⁴ The focus of this discussion on the NPL will be on relief in the south and east but due to the paucity of studies mention will be made of work covering other areas. It is also very important to retain an awareness of the national picture.

Turning firstly to the provision of outdoor relief, the new Central Authority after 1834 aimed to control the administration of poor relief, both outdoor and indoor, by issuing a series of regulations and directives. One of the key orders that was sent out to the unions by the Poor Law Commission was the 1844 Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order. While intended to define the

⁶³ S. King, 'Rights, Duties and Practice in the Transition between the Old and New Poor Laws 1820s-1860s', in *Obligation, Entitlement*, 263-291.

⁶⁴ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 233.

limits of providing outdoor relief to the able-bodied, the regulation included a number of exceptions making it possible for guardians to continue to support the poor in their homes, for example in cases of family sickness. Guardians could also make a direct request to the Commissioners to relieve the able-bodied in exceptional circumstances.

Historians have disputed to what extent the Poor Law Commissioners' aim of ending outdoor relief to the able-bodied was successful under the NPL. Exceptions to the Prohibitory Order meant that in some unions considerable numbers of able-bodied men appear to have received outdoor payments particularly by the 1840s. Digby found that to be the case in rural Norfolk once the new legislation had become established and farmers largely took on the role of guardians. Unemployment and under-employment in the 1840s led to the payment of relief 'on the ostensible ground for sickness' so that guardians could ensure that labourers were available to work. By the 1850s over eighty per cent of adult able-bodied paupers in Norfolk received outdoor relief rather than indoor relief while the workhouses were rarely full. Sarah Bradley's recent study of the Bromsgrove poor law union lends further weight to Digby's findings that some guardians made exceptional payments 'ostensibly for illness'.⁶⁵ Michael Rose noted that allowances in aid of small, often irregular earnings continued under the NPL due to loopholes in the legislation. However, it was generally only a supplement. On the other hand Karel Williams has argued that the aim of the Commissioners had been to reduce outdoor relief to able-bodied men rather than eliminate it and they were successful in achieving that. Williams used government data to show that in 1803 approximately 100,000 men received outdoor relief but by 1849-1861 this figure was closer to 5,000.⁶⁶

Yet, even if outdoor relief was available and guardians became more relaxed in their interpretation of the new regulations by the 1840s, there is considerable consensus in the historiography that poor relief was harsher under the NPL. National spending on relief went down after 1834 from £6310,000 (8s.10d. per head) to £4045,000 in 1837 (5s.5d.) and remained at between 5s. and 7s. per head for the rest of the century despite a rise in

⁶⁵ Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', 162. The clerk for the Bromsgrove union admitted to the Poor Law Commission that the guardians gave relief to family members which amounted to making up workers' wages: S. Bradley, 'Welcoming the New Poor Law: The Bromsgrove Poor Law Union, 1836-1847', *Family and Community History*, 22 (2019), 200-221.

⁶⁶ M. Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law', *The Economic History Review*, 19, (1966), 607-620; K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: 1981), 70-71.

population.⁶⁷ Reductions in expenditure were in part achieved by contracting outdoor relief lists. Samantha Williams' assessment of household budgets in the Ampthill Union in Bedfordshire, published in the 1837/38 Select Committee report on the PLAA, identified a notable drop in relief spending after 1834 and a reduction in families (a married couple with children living at home) receiving poor relief, from twenty-seven in 1834 to only four in 1837.⁶⁸ Digby and Snell have argued that in rural areas labourers who were denied outdoor relief were unwilling to accept indoor relief which resulted in surplus labour leading to lower wages. Boyer questioned Snell's assessment of a reduced income for labourers as the cost of living had gone down by the 1840s, although King noted that a decline in living costs was unlikely to account for the reduction in relief spending. The value of poor relief payments under the NPL showed little sign of an increase since the OPL. Karel Williams calculated that the average weekly allowance was 1s. per head in the 1840s rising to 1s.6d. by the mid-1850s. Thomson quoted 3s. as an average pension for the elderly while in urban areas such pensions were less generous averaging 2s. 6d., and widows with children received 1s. or 1s.6d. per person.⁶⁹

The above studies are largely based on government data; detailed local research can provide a clearer picture of the experience of poor relief and is needed to complement centralised sources. The few available localised studies of relief under the NPL have a fairly restricted time span; none cover the 1840s to the 1860s or an extended period from the final decades of the OPL to the first decades of the NPL, although King's work on the New Forest and Bolton unions covered 1821-1850. He identified a change in the profile of outdoor relief recipients in the 1840s in the New Forest. There were far fewer elderly men, young widows, children or younger men with families who had probably been taken into the workhouse. Proportionately more women than men received outdoor relief. However, like Digby, King found that a surprising number of able-bodied labourers continued to receive outdoor relief often due to sickness. Moreover supplements to pensions apparent under the OPL continued but they tended to be in cash as the buying and distribution infrastructures of individual overseers had been lost following unionisation. Regional differences were apparent in King's comparison of the New Forest union with the Bolton union. In the latter the number of pensions and their value was

⁶⁷ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 79.

⁶⁸ S. Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief and the Economy of Makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History*, 16 (2005), 21-52.

⁶⁹ Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', 161; Snell, *Annals*, 121; Boyer, *An Economic History*, 210; King, *Poverty and welfare*, 229; Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 186-187.

smaller suggesting a harsher system in the northern union; however, a harsher system had also been apparent in the north under the OPL. In that sense enduring regional differences persisted under the NPL. Significantly King noted that the guardians in Bolton often defied orders from the Central Authority including those concerning the payment of rents and allowances in aid of wages.⁷⁰

Moving the discussion onto indoor relief, core to the Poor Law Commissioners' plan to cut costs and reduce outdoor relief was the establishment of deterrent workhouses which, it was intended, would be the only option for many requesting support. In some unions OPL workhouses were retained and developed; however, in many unions larger new establishments were built. A number of local studies of workhouses have contributed to our knowledge of the profile of indoor relief recipients during the first decades of the NPL and suggest that it could vary depending on the local economy. In the rural Bridge Union in Kent in the late-1830s fifty per cent of inmates were children; only thirteen per cent were over sixty and approximately twenty-one per cent were women of working age and fifteen per cent were men of working age. Most of the men in the workhouse were labourers but there were a small number of tradesmen. A notable feature of indoor relief in the Bridge Union was the regular movement of people in and out of the house; many residents only stayed a short time. Goose's study of the workhouse populations in the predominantly rural county of Hertfordshire found a slightly different workhouse profile. Here children and notably boys made up a third rather than half of the residents. Differences in the local economy may explain this as in Hertfordshire the straw plaiting industry provided employment for girls. A comparison between the Hertfordshire workhouse profiles and those of the city of Winchester and market town of Basingstoke in Hampshire also revealed variations as more elderly men were in the workhouse in the rural unions, possibly because of the impact of agricultural work on their health.⁷¹

With reference to conditions for the indoor poor, the NPL workhouses have regularly been portrayed in a bad light, both within contemporary literature and in the historiography. The psychological fear of workhouses, particularly amongst the elderly, was noted in the discussion

⁷⁰ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 239-251.

⁷¹ M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The history of an English social institution* (London: 1981), 232-260; N. Goose, 'Workhouse Populations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999), 52-69; A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, 'The Populations of Two Hampshire Workhouses, 1851-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998), 38-53.

on OPL workhouses above. Both Crowther and Digby argue that the NPL workhouses were also psychologically oppressive. Because the diet and living conditions for many labourers was barely at subsistence level, it was difficult to make conditions worse in the workhouse. The separation of families, strict discipline and tedium served to make it a negative experience for those who had little option but to accept indoor relief.⁷² However, just as historians are revealing the individual experiences of the indoor poor under the OPL, work on autobiographies and pauper correspondence is calling into question the orthodox view that workhouses were wholly places of suffering. Alannah Tomkins argues that there were 'multiple Poor Laws in operation'. Her study of working-class autobiographies between 1834 and 1914 has found that a range of factors including the guardians' interpretation of their duties and responsibilities, the personality of workhouse staff, and family context could impact on how children in particular perceived their time in a Poor Law institution.⁷³ Jones, King and Thompson have used sources including newspaper reports and pauper correspondence to call for a more nuanced approach as the experiences of the indoor poor were wide-ranging. Relief practice was far from uniform despite the aims of the Central Authority.⁷⁴

In fact there is consensus in the historiography that the Poor Law Commission failed to embody national uniformity. The Webbs pointed out that policies such as the use of a deterrent workhouse were less viable in industrial regions which experienced periods of temporary unemployment due to trade cycles. Eric Midwinter noted that in Lancashire due to opposition to the new legislation it may have been difficult for both relief recipients and officials to distinguish between the Old and New Poor Laws. Megan Evans and Peter Jones have also identified resistance to the NPL in Lancashire and in particular in Wales where there was a dislike of the notion of the workhouse and individual unions employed stalling tactics. However, Lewis Darwen found that there were exceptions in densely populated unions in

⁷² Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 271; A. Digby, *British Welfare Policy: Workhouse to Welfare* (London: 1989), 32.

⁷³ A. Tomkins, 'Poor Law Institutions through Working-Class Eyes: Autobiography, Emotion and Family Context, 1834-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 60 (2021), 285-309.

⁷⁴ P. Jones, S. King, and K. Thompson, 'Clothing the New Poor Law Workhouse in the Nineteenth Century', *Rural History*, 32 (2021), 127-148.

south-east Lancashire where the NPL was more welcome to officials who could see the benefit of indoor relief.⁷⁵

These studies provide some small insight into the work of the NPL boards of guardians in the mid-nineteenth century. A more detailed analysis of the composition and administration of four unions in Hertfordshire during the 1830s and 1840s has been carried out by Karen Rothery. She noted that the guardians came from a variety of backgrounds with a high number of clergy. Approximately one third were farmers and a relatively small number were in retail, trade or manufacture. There were certain continuities with the OPL as an elite few carried out most of the decision making on the boards. Like other studies, Rothery found that the poor relief bill in Hertfordshire fell after 1834. By 1847 relief spending was twenty-nine per cent lower than in the final years of the OPL. She also remarked on intra-regional differences with the predominantly rural Hitchin union spending more on outdoor relief than neighbouring unions and the town union of St Albans spending more on indoor relief. At the same time there were similarities between the unions including seasonal patterns in expenditure with higher spending in the winter months.⁷⁶

This discussion has identified a small range of studies that have considered poor relief during the first two to three decades of the NPL. One question that has not been addressed is whether there was a change in demand on poor relief, notably in rural areas by the late-1850s. A number of historians have referred to a 'High Farming Period' at this time or a 'Golden Age of Farming'.⁷⁷ Goose observed that workhouse admissions declined in Hertfordshire during the 1850s as economic conditions improved and Boyer provides data showing that the percentage of adult able-bodied paupers receiving indoor relief fell from just over twenty-one per cent in the 1840s to just under thirteen per cent by 1865. He also noted that the return of agricultural prosperity after 1853 brought a sharp increase in labourers' wages.⁷⁸ Eric Jones also discussed a

⁷⁵ S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, 83; E. Midwinter, 'State Intervention at the local level: the New Poor Law in Lancashire', *The Historical Journal* (1967), 112; M. Evans and P. Jones, "'A Stubborn Intractable Body": Resistance to the Workhouse in Wales, 1834-1877', *Family and Community History*, 17 (2014), 101-121; L. Darwen, 'Implementing and administering the New Poor Law in the industrial north: a case study of Preston Union in regional context, 1837-1861', (Unpublished PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University: 2015).

⁷⁶ K. Rothery, 'The Implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire c. 1830-1847', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016).

⁷⁷ E. Jones, 'The Agricultural Labour market in England, 1793-1872', *The Economic History Review*, 17 (1964), 338; Goose, 'Workhouse Populations', 65; Hurren, *Protesting*, 102.

⁷⁸ Goose, 'Workhouse Populations', 65; Boyer, *An Economic History*, 205.

rise in agricultural wages by the mid-1860s. Wages may well have increased following a reduction in the size of the agricultural workforce apparent in the censuses between 1851 and 1861, possibly due to migration into towns and cities. Wages also improved as farmers began to use more mechanisation, including threshing machines, leading to specialism in the labour force. The *Farmers Magazine* had adverts offering ordinary farmhands good wages and cottages in Sussex and Nottinghamshire by the late-1850s.⁷⁹ On the otherhand, Hurren found that during the High Farming period in Brixworth, Northamptonshire, in the 1860s labourers were still living at subsistence level and older workers in particular did not benefit from improved farming.⁸⁰

Clearly this is a period that calls out for more detailed study of the poor law records in rural counties to assess whether or not conditions for some of the poor improved and the profile of relief recipients had changed by the late-1850s/early-1860s. Indeed this section on the NPL has identified several gaps in the literature which a study of Sussex can help to fill. These include assessing continuity or discontinuity in the provision of relief during the decades before and after the introduction of the NPL; how guardians related to a centralised authority, and the extent to which they were able to maintain local practices; and whether the relationship changed between relief officials and the poor. All of these questions need to be addressed with intra-regionality in mind. The final section of the Historiographical Review will assess what studies have been made of the poor law in eastern Sussex and whether they consider any of the above questions.

2.4 Sussex Historiography

The very limited literature on poor relief in Sussex consists of two important articles which discuss local strategies to deal with escalating relief costs in the 1820s; references to Sussex parishes in works on rural unrest in the 1830s; four studies which consider the relationship between the new boards of guardians and Assistant Poor Law Commissioners in Sussex parishes and the study of two workhouses, one in West Sussex and one in Brighton. Alannah Tomkins' current research into Small Bills and Petty Finance (1700-1834) includes Sussex

⁷⁹ Jones, 'The agricultural labour market', 322-338.

⁸⁰ Hurren, *Protesting*, 99-101.

parishes and can make an important contribution to research into parish administration under the OPL.⁸¹

Wells has assessed the impact of the Sturges-Bourne Acts in two Sussex parishes; Westbourne on the coastal plain in the west of Sussex and Ticehurst in the High Weald in the east of Sussex. In 1819 both parishes chose to set up Select Vestries which imposed stricter poor relief measures. In Westbourne unemployed men were sent to work on the highways and were paid low wages. In Ticehurst, where there were much higher levels of unemployment, several measures were used to maintain the under/unemployed including renting a parish farm, using a ticketing system to provide employment on local farms, work on the roads and in a quarry. In both parishes more use was made of the workhouse notably for illegitimate children and children from large families. Wells examined the membership of the two Select Vestries and found that in both the number of vestry members ranged from twelve to twenty but a core of approximately eight men attended regularly, mostly the more substantial householders who were also paying the majority of the rates. Assistant overseers were appointed in the two parishes which proved to be very unpopular. In Ticehurst the assistant overseer, William Barron, fled from protesters during the Swing Riots alarmed by the treatment of a fellow overseer in the locality who was carried out of his parish in a cart. Wells' research provides a very useful comparison with the Sussex parishes in this study when considering relief officials and how they dealt with increasing levels of poverty in the final years of the OPL.⁸²

The decision by the Ticehurst vestry to rent a farm to provide work for the unemployed was replicated in a number of parishes, notably in the Weald. Griffin has made a study of parish farms between 1815 and 1835 and has found these schemes to have been widely adopted in the Kent and Sussex Weald. Local officials could either hire an existing farm or rent land to provide work such as potato growing for able-bodied men. Little attention has been paid to this method of poor relief; however, Griffin argued that many southern parishes set up farms, 'occasionally with great success'. Parishes in the Weald experienced a particular problem with the unemployment of rural workers. There were also a number of unoccupied farms in the Weald by the 1820s due to the high cost of the poor rates. Griffin identified eight parishes in

⁸¹ <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects>: Small bills and petty finance (accessed 18/11/21).

⁸² R. Wells, 'Poor-Law Reform in the Rural South-East; the Impact of the Sturges Bourne Acts during the Agricultural Depression, 1815-1835', *Southern History*, 23 (2001), 52-115.

the east of Sussex which used farms including Hellingly and East Hoathly which form part of this study.⁸³

Arguably, the greatest attention given to Sussex in poor law historiography focuses on resistance movements including the Swing Riots in 1830 and the later opposition to the NPL. Given the high levels of unemployment, poverty and increasing relief costs in rural Sussex it is not surprising that the Sussex Weald in particular witnessed instances of disturbance. Hobsbawm and Rudé cite several Sussex parishes which were involved in the Swing Riots. In October 1830 there were incidents of incendiaryism in eastern Sussex. Men gathered in Ringmer to demand an increase in wages which was agreed by Lord Gage. In November disturbances spread to West Sussex and included machine breaking in the Chichester area. Hobsbawm and Rudé argue that the agricultural labourer was demoralised by a poor relief system which meant he had to, 'go cap in hand to his betters.'⁸⁴

Wells' discussion of resistance to the NPL in 1835 cites persistent opposition in many Sussex parishes. Protests tended to be on a small scale compared with 1830, although in Ringmer the relieving officer was 'carried' across the parish boundary which was reminiscent of Swing. There were disturbances in workhouses, handmills were smashed in the Hailsham workhouse, and localised protests such as opposition to the end of poor relief funding for boarding out widows' children in West Firle. Centres of radicalism included Brighton and Lewes. Protests were supported by the *Brighton Patriot* newspaper and Wells argued that the unrest had an impact on local parliamentary elections. He suggested that the Tory candidate was elected in Lewes in 1837 partly because he criticised the separation of families in workhouses and the reduction in outdoor relief for the temporarily unemployed.⁸⁵

When discussing resistance to the new legislation, Wells also considered the relationship between the Assistant Poor Law Commissioners and the new boards of guardians. He suggested that Commissioner Hawley provoked hostility in Lewes by only inviting the more affluent inhabitants to meetings and by avoiding public meetings. Chakrit Choomwattana has studied the relationship between the Commissioners and the new guardians across Sussex

⁸³ C. Griffin, 'Parish Farms and the poor law: a response to unemployment in rural southern England, c.1815-1835', *Agricultural History Review*, 59 (2011), 176-198.

⁸⁴ Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, 75, 104-106.

⁸⁵ R. Wells, 'Resistance to the New Poor Law in the rural south', in J. Rule and R. Wells (eds.), *Crime, Protest and Popular Politics in Southern England, 1740-1850* (London: 1997), 91-125.

during the introduction of the NPL. The reception of the new legislation varied. Guardians on the Battle, Rye and Uckfield unions were shaken by the recent unrest and supported the NPL. However, in Lewes the local tradesmen on the new board resented central government interference in their affairs. Choomwattana highlighted the importance of the stance taken by the chair of the unions; Hawley found it much easier to deal with the Earl of Liverpool in Uckfield or the Duke of Richmond in Westhampnett who supported the NPL. However, the boards chaired by Lord Egremont in Petworth and Richard King Sampson in Hailsham were resistant to the changes. Spencer Thomas's study of the Petworth union demonstrated that officials were able to maintain their own practices of supporting the poor, notably arranging emigration to Canada. George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont, personally funded labourers who wished to emigrate and the Petworth union resisted regulations issued by the Poor Law Commissioners and continued to provide outdoor relief to those who remained at home after 1834. Barry Fletcher described how Hawley attempted to merge Westhampnett and Chichester into one union but there was strong opposition from both sides. The president of the Chichester guardians, James Gray, was a radical and supported a petition against the NPL. The above studies demonstrate the importance of carrying out research into the officials who administered poor relief as their backgrounds and attitudes could have an important impact on the provision of relief locally.⁸⁶

An assessment of the historiography of indoor relief in Sussex has only identified two published studies: an article on the Chichester workhouse in West Sussex and James Gardner's book on the Brighton workhouse. The history of Chichester workhouse has been traced from surviving Court Books covering 1753 to 1816. These records describe the building, the funding of relief, administration and daily life in the workhouse. There is also mention of outdoor relief which was disallowed after 1774 due to high demand. Gardner has made a detailed study of the Brighton workhouse from 1727 to the early-twentieth century. His work provides a useful comparison for the study of indoor relief in the parishes within this study, in particular the

⁸⁶ Wells, 'Resistance to the New Poor Law', 95; C. Choomwattana, 'The Opposition to the New Poor Law in Sussex, 1834-1837', (Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1986); S. Thomas, 'Power, paternalism, patronage and philanthropy: the Wyndhams and the New Poor Law in Petworth', *Local Historian*, 32 (2002), 99-117; B. Fletcher, 'Chichester and the Westhampnett Poor Law Union', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 134 (1996), 185-196.

information on the number of workhouse inmates across the period (seventy in 1777 rising to 616 by the 1850s).⁸⁷

Sussex historiography to date is clearly unable to address the questions posed by this study. With the exception of Gardner's and Thomas's work there is no literature on the NPL in Sussex and therefore no attempt to compare relief across the period 1800-1860 or to consider whether it changed following the NPL. Furthermore there is an absence of parish relief studies and therefore it is not possible to make intra-regional comparisons. However, Wells' assessment of the composition of vestries under the OPL in Westbourne and more particularly in Ticehurst in the east of Sussex and Fletcher's work on the new boards of guardians in West Sussex recognise the important role of officials in determining whether there were intra-regional differences in relief. While the present literature may not tackle the issues in this study, there are at least references to aspects of the study in individual parishes in the east of Sussex such as parish relief schemes, vestry and guardian personnel, workhouse conditions and attitudes towards the implementation of the NPL. Moreover, the focus in the Sussex historiography on unrest in Sussex in the early-1830s emphasises the significance of this region in poor law history and the importance of studying the East Sussex relief records.

Conclusion

This discussion of the historiography of the Poor Laws at the end of the eighteenth century and during the first half of the nineteenth century has identified studies which indicate that there were both regional and intra-regional differences in relief under the OPL and also common trends which reflected change over time resulting from exogenous factors such as population growth, fluctuating food prices and downturns in the economy. Wheat growing agricultural communities in the southeast witnessed particularly high relief spending in the final decades of the OPL and while a number of south eastern counties have received attention in the historiography no work has been published on Sussex. Studies in the historiography which focus on the introduction of the NPL and the role of officials have begun to question the permanency of changes in the provision of relief. Yet little work has been done to establish to what extent guardians maintained local practices in the long term under the NPL and to

⁸⁷ M. Dangerfield, O. Marshall, E. Stringer and V. Welch, 'Chichester Workhouse', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 79, 131-167; J. Gardner, *Brighton Union Workhouse*, (Gosport: 2012).

examine the poor's experience of relief, both indoor and outdoor, once the NPL had been established in the 1840s and 1850s.

The importance of considering changes in the Old and New Poor Laws across an extended period of time has been recognised in the historiography; for example in studies by Hollen Lees and Crowther. Yet their research covers a number of regions and does not trace the experiences of individual communities affected by the Old and New Poor Laws.⁸⁸ This study is the first to attempt to consider relief across the period 1800-1860 in several parish communities within a single research agenda focused on eastern Sussex. In the following chapter the reasons for choosing Sussex as a focus for this research are explored. The wide range of local and national records available for eastern Sussex is discussed. One of the most significant features of the area is that it contained a number of different neighbouring communities. Steven King referred to the difficulty of finding a 'representative mix of communities' which include varying socio-economic types as well as a balance of different sizes of population.⁸⁹ The geographical and economic backgrounds to the parishes in this study are therefore examined in Chapter Three prior to an assessment of relief practices in the succeeding chapters.

⁸⁸ Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*; Crowther, *The Workhouse System*.

⁸⁹ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 7.

Chapter Three

Sources, methodology and background to the parishes

Introduction

A study such as this, which deals with two completely different administrative systems over a long period and across sixteen parishes, inevitably involves a complex range of sources. Such sources have their individual strengths and weaknesses but these are magnified when they are compared over space or time and where they are linked together to obtain a deeper understanding of the nature of poor relief. This chapter begins with a critical discussion of the various sources used to examine relief under the Old and New Poor Laws at a local level and also records which enable comparison to be made between Sussex and other counties. This is followed by an explanation of the methods adopted to deal with a project that has a broad temporal and spatial scope but which also aims to examine the experience of individuals in detail. Finally, the background to the parishes selected for the study are discussed including comparative information on their geography, economy and demography which, it is argued, could all impact on the level of poor relief in individual parishes.¹

Sources

The census reports have been used to obtain information on population, occupation and family size in each parish. Census data was first collected in England in 1801 and thereafter every ten years; the range of information obtained developed during the nineteenth century. In the first census questions covered the parish population, the number of households and the numbers employed in types of occupation such as agriculture or trade. By 1821 information included the occupation of the household head, the number of household occupants and how many families were living in each house. In 1841 the occupation of each household member was recorded while for the study of rural parishes the 1851 census is particularly useful as it recorded farm

¹ Langton considered the human ecological dimension of poverty in his study of the 'geography' of poor relief in rural Oxfordshire: J. Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire 1775-1832', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle upon Tyne: 2015).

acreage and the number of men and boys employed next to the name of the farmer as head of the household. It also indicated whether an individual was a pauper.

However, historians have identified a number of flaws in the census as a source. Edward Higgs noted that the 1841 census was recorded in June when movements associated with summer migrations may have affected local population figures; future Victorian censuses were therefore taken in March and April. Householders were asked what members of the household 'called themselves' and terminology relating to occupations could be problematic, for example there was not always a clear distinction between 'servant', 'labourer' or 'agricultural labourer'. Furthermore, part-time work was often not considered worthy of an occupational description, thus the work of women and children could be under-recorded. Other issues with the 1841 census include imprecise recording of age, which was given in multiples of five, and information on place of birth was limited to the question 'were you born in this county?'² Poor legibility and clerical errors are further problems that might be encountered. Variations in the spelling of names can make it difficult to trace the same person across censuses. From 1841 householders were required to complete a schedule and the information was then entered into census enumerators' books. Dennis Mills and Kevin Schurer note that this process could be, 'accompanied by much editorial interference'.³ However, the census is a very important source for this study as the 1841, 1851 and 1861 censuses are available for all of the sample parishes and the 1821 and 1831 censuses are available for two of the parishes.

Parish registers are a further source available for all of the parishes in this study and one that can also be used to check on individuals named in the relief records. The registers have limitations as they record dates of baptism, marriage and burial carried out by the Anglican Church and do not include non-conformists or Catholics.⁴ Moreover, they refer to people who were born and/or died in the parish and this did not apply to a sizeable proportion of the population. In rural areas represented by the study parishes, migration was often at a local level between nearby parishes but this means that many individuals in the relief records cannot

² E. Higgs, 'Occupational Censuses and the Agricultural Workforce in Victorian England and Wales', *The Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 700-716.

³ D. R. Mills and K. Schurer, 'The enumeration process', in D. Mills and K. Schurer (eds.), *Local Communities in the Victorian Census Enumerators' Books* (Oxford: 1996).

⁴ Wrigley and Schofield note that the percentage of families who avoided Anglican ceremonies increased during the eighteenth century: E. Wrigley and R. Schofield, 'English Population History from Family Reconstitution: Summary Results 1600-1799', *Population Studies*, 37 (1983), 157-184.

be matched in the registers.⁵ Micro-studies which involve family reconstitution have had only partial success in finding individuals listed in sources such as relief records in the parish registers.⁶ Nevertheless, the latter can provide valuable information on marital status and whether individuals had children. On occasion it is possible to learn whether people died in a workhouse.⁷ From 1837 births, marriages and deaths were recorded nationally and those named in the poor law records can often be located using genealogy websites such as *Ancestry* and *Find My Past*.⁸

The main sources for the provision of poor relief under the OPL in the study parishes are vestry minutes, overseers' records and rate books. In all parishes a group of parishioners held regular vestry meetings to decide on a range of issues including the collection of rates and distribution of relief to the poor. The number and status of people attending the vestry varied considerably between parishes and, as will be seen in the following chapters, resulted in some variation in relief practices. The minutes for the parishes in this study varied in terms of the detail recorded and range from simply listing the date of the meeting, those present and a very brief summary of any business to more detailed accounts of matters discussed and valuable information regarding changes in relief policy. One or two overseers were appointed by the vestry annually; they were responsible for recording the relief payments which they distributed to the poor of the parish. Steven King has observed that during the final decades of the OPL more robust systems of local accounting and data collection were developed, partly in

⁵ Long notes that the high rate of internal mobility from rural parishes to towns was a prevalent feature of nineteenth century Britain: J. Long, 'Rural-Urban Migration and Socioeconomic Mobility in Victorian Britain', *The Journal of Economic History*, 65 (2005), 1-35. Sheppard has analysed out-migration from one of the study parishes, Chiddingly, between 1821 and 1851. She concluded that there was considerable continuous local 'circular' population movement for purposes of marriage and employment: J. Sheppard, 'Out-migration 1821-1851 from a wealden parish: Chiddingly', *Local Population Studies*, 59 (1997), 13-25.

⁶ King refers to problems with nominal linkage in his study of welfare in Calverley and notes that the studies of Neuman-Brown and Wales failed to link between thirty and forty per cent of people in the registers and in poverty data: S. King, 'Reconstructing Lives: The Poor, the Poor Law and Welfare in Calverley, 1650-1820', *Social History*, 22, (1997). Williams was only able to match eleven per cent of those in receipt of a relief pension in the parish of Campton to the parish registers and thirty four per cent of those with a pension in Shefford to the parish registers: S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Suffolk: 2011).

⁷ When individuals died in the union workhouse this was often recorded in the parish registers during the NPL period after 1836.

⁸ Schweber notes a groundswell of interest in statistics relating to society by the early-nineteenth century; the government used statistical data to analyse issues related to poverty and public health: L. Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830-1885* (Durham: 2006), 106.

response to concerns regarding increased spending on poor relief.⁹ Overseers were required to keep accurate accounts which were signed off each year by vestry members and two local magistrates. However, while a certain consistency in the information recorded was expected, we need to be mindful of inaccuracies in the record keeping, including miscalculations and spontaneous payments which were sometimes missed out in the accounts.¹⁰

Overseers' records for each parish have varying titles including accounts, registers, pay lists and disbursements. These sources refer to payments to the poor and also to tradesmen for providing food, clothing and other necessities which were distributed as relief in kind.¹¹ There were slight variations in record-keeping by the overseers in each parish with a tendency for the larger parishes to create a wider range of records. For example, when noting the number of relief recipients, some of the smaller parishes kept one set of accounts listing all of the disbursements each year including casual payments to individuals in need, more regular payments and weekly pensions. On the other hand, larger parishes such as Hailsham kept general relief accounts, weekly and monthly accounts and labour accounts. Some officials kept separate books recording rates and ratepayers while others included this information in the overseers' accounts. Data on the number of ratepayers and the value of their property is available for most years between 1800 and 1835 and this study is unique in paying attention to ratepayers and comparing rate levels between several parishes.¹²

There are limits to the usefulness of parish records, as King points out. Overseers' records and accounts were, 'end-of-process sources' which recorded final decisions but may well have left out requests that were not met or were revised before a decision was made.¹³ Moreover, the relief records for this period dealt primarily with outdoor rather than indoor relief. With the exception of one parish, St John Sub Castro in Lewes, there are no available discrete 'workhouse records'. Not all of the study parishes had a workhouse during the OPL; for those that did there are some references in the overseers' accounts to bills covering supplies to, or work carried out in, the workhouse or poor house. There are also occasional references to

⁹ S. King, "'In these you may trust'". Numerical information, accounting practices and the poor law, c. 1790 to 1840', in T. Crook and G. O'Hara (eds), *Statistics and the Public Sphere: Numbers and the People in Modern Britain, c. 1750-2000* (London: 2011), 51-66.

¹⁰ S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s* (London: 2019), 9.

¹¹ Tradesmen's bills and vouchers are currently being studied through a project run by A. Tomkins: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects>.

¹² Although Williams discusses ratepayers in one of her study parishes, Shefford: Williams, *Poverty, Gender*.

¹³ King, *Writing the Lives*, 9.

individuals being offered indoor support. Therefore, for the OPL it is not possible to gain comparative numbers of people receiving indoor relief from the parish accounts. However, the government surveys in 1803 and 1832 recorded whether or not a parish had a workhouse and, for those that did, the number of indoor poor (see below). It has also been possible to obtain indoor lists for 1821 or 1831 for the parishes with extant census records. This information has been used to discuss the use of indoor relief by officials in different parishes under the OPL, and to make comparisons in some parishes between the number of people receiving indoor relief prior to, and following, the NPL.

A further challenge to compiling accurate data for the study is the variable survival of records for each parish; a problem encountered by all studies based on relief records. Two of the sample parishes have extant overseers' accounts covering only one or two years, six parishes have records covering between seven and nineteen years, six have over twenty years and two have surviving records covering the whole period 1800-1835. Parishes with good coverage include those in the Weald, the Downs and Lewes making comparison between these regions viable. The issues with spelling and legibility discussed above also apply to the overseers' records. Variations in the way people were addressed can cause problems; for example, Mrs Smith might also be called Dame Smith or Widow Smith in the same record and could represent one person or three different people. However, reference to a range of records and consideration of information such as age, address or other family members can help with this.

Although relief records changed when the NPL unions were formed in Sussex in 1835 as accounts were kept by a union clerk, it is still possible to obtain some information on pauper numbers and spending in each parish. Ledgers are available for all five unions covered in this study for a range of years between 1836 and 1860 and include information for each parish on financial contributions to the union, expenditure on outdoor relief, and the number of days spent in the workhouse by parishioners. In the ledgers for three of the unions there are references to the number of people in receipt of outdoor and indoor relief. While individuals are not named in these sources, they are very useful for calculating parish expenditure on poor relief and for gaining an overview of the relative use of indoor relief across the parishes. They

appear to be an underused resource in relief studies; it is possible that Sussex is unusual in having extant ledgers.¹⁴

Boards of guardians' minute books recorded meetings of the NPL unions which were generally held weekly or fortnightly. One or two elected guardians attended the meetings from each parish in addition to ex-officio members, often magistrates. The minutes are not available for one of the study unions, West Firle; however, some information on relief numbers and spending can be obtained for that union from the ledgers discussed above. The minutes are available for the other unions for most years between 1836 and 1860. They vary in the detail they contain: all record attendees at the meetings and include some information on the business discussed. They also refer to correspondence with the central Poor Law Commissioners (and later the Poor Law Board) and it is possible to gain an indication of the attitude of the guardians to some of the regulations that central administrators wished to impose on local officials. The minutes for the Hailsham and Newhaven unions are particularly useful as they include information about individuals who were given outdoor relief. The Newhaven clerk went into some detail about the resources available to those requesting relief and the reasons for making the request.¹⁵

Information on indoor relief under the NPL is available in the workhouse admission and discharge registers for three of the unions: Hailsham, Newhaven and Uckfield. The Hailsham and Newhaven registers have survived for most years and the Uckfield registers for the 1850s. They list all those people going into and coming out of the workhouse and include information on the sex and age of indoor paupers and often family details, reasons for entering and leaving the workhouse, behaviour whilst resident there and sometimes occupation and religion. In addition, there are separate lists of indoor and outdoor poor for the parish of Chiddingly which were kept by the parish clerk. However, one of the problems with using sources with different

¹⁴ There have been few studies of relief under the NPL; those studies which cover this period have not referred to union ledgers. Studies include: M. Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law,' *Economic History Review*, 19, (1966), 607-620; N. Goose, 'Workhouse Populations in the mid-nineteenth century: the case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999), 52-69 and S. Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief and the Economy of Makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History*, 16 (2005), 21-52.

¹⁵ Rothery's study of the implementation of the NPL in Hertfordshire between 1830 and 1847 makes extensive use of the boards of guardians' minute books for four unions. Her study provides a useful comparison with this Sussex study as she focuses on the profile of officials, although she does not look at individual relief recipients: K. Rothery, 'The Implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire c1830-1847', (Unpublished PhD, University of Hertfordshire, 2016).

levels of detail is that some parishes might be portrayed as placing greater emphasis on certain forms of relief. In the following chapters an attempt is made to assess levels of relief spending and relief numbers during the NPL period by comparing sources such as the ledgers which were similar across the parishes. A more in-depth study of individual relief recipients can be made by concentrating on data from the Newhaven and Hailsham unions. Fortunately these two unions represent the Weald and the Downs making intra-regional comparisons possible.

In addition to parish and union records, a range of other sources have been utilised. These include correspondence from a chairman of the Newhaven union, the Earl of Chichester, which was published in the 1834 Poor Law Report, as well as a diary and three short biographies of local officials, two of which include the officials' views on poor relief. These are a vital reminder of the individuality and humanity behind the names in historical records.¹⁶ Another important source for this research is local newspaper articles. The newspapers reported attacks on the property of certain overseers during instances of local unrest in the final decades of the OPL which might indicate whether an official was unpopular. They also referred to appeals against relief decisions during both poor law periods. Several newspapers reported on meetings between the new unions and the Poor Law Commissioners. However, it is important to be aware of the political leanings of a particular title. In Sussex the *Brighton Patriot*, which only ran from 1835 to 1838, was strongly opposed to the NPL and had the backing of William Cobbett. Other papers, including the *Sussex Advertiser*, encouraged people to uphold the law and accept the Poor Law Commissioners' orders.¹⁷

While this study is focused on poor relief in eastern Sussex, it is also important to make comparisons with other counties through use of national sources such as government reports. These are a vital resource when placing relief numbers, expenditure and policy in Sussex within a wider context. The government first began to collect data on poor relief statistics in the 1770s and 1780s. By the early-nineteenth century concerns regarding the cost of poverty stimulated the government to gather numerical information nationally on a regular basis starting with

¹⁶ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws*, PP 1834, C.44. The local officials are John Ellman of Glynde: ESRO, F. Walesby, *Memoir of Mr. Ellman*, (Lewes: 1847); the overseer of Berwick, William Stace: ESRO, Rev. E. Ellman, *Recollections of a Sussex Parson*, (Derbyshire: 2004); the overseer Richard Lower of Chiddingly: ESRO, Chiddingly Vestry minutes, 1831-1862, PAR/292/12, and the overseer Thomas Turner of East Hoathly: *The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765* (Oxford: 1984).

¹⁷ C. Choomwattana, 'The Opposition to the New Poor Law in Sussex, 1834-1837', (Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1986), 15.

questions to parish officials regarding the expense and maintenance of the poor in 1803 and continuing annually.¹⁸ There are difficulties with the interpretation of 'expenditure' in the surveys; the data given to the government enquiries does not always match up with figures in the parish account books. This might be because there were a range of expenses relating to supporting the poor such as the cost of travel to remove a family, postage or repairs to the workhouse in addition to allowances and pensions given to individuals. In fact there are often discrepancies between data in local accounts and government records, not only concerning expenditure but also relief numbers. This could be due to error or possibly a desire on the part of local or central government officials to give a certain impression in their records regarding relief statistics.

The 1803 report includes information on expenditure on the poor and the number of people receiving outdoor and indoor relief. Numbers of relief recipients were broken down into people over sixty, other adults and children. All of the study parishes sent replies to the survey and these have been used to provide comparative data on poor relief for the early-1800s. John Poynter has suggested that the returns are unreliable as pauper numbers were exaggerated and the year 1802/3, when data was collected, was abnormal as it followed a period of scarcity.¹⁹ However, inaccuracies in the data would apply to all parishes and are less of an issue in a comparative study such as this one. The returns are useful as a tool to compare provision between the study parishes and between parishes more widely, notably in the southeast, but also nationally. Other statistical government surveys referenced in the study for the Old Poor Law period include poor rate returns between 1816 and 1824.

There were several attempts by members of parliament to revise the poor laws in the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth centuries, including a Select Committee review of the English Poor Laws in 1817 which gives a useful background to the Old Poor Law welfare system.²⁰ However, the Poor Law Commissioners' report published in 1834 provides the most detailed information on relief at parish level, in particular the replies from local officials to questionnaires sent out by the Commissioners in 1832 which are published as an appendix to

¹⁸ S. King, "In These You May Trust", 51.

¹⁹ *Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of the poor in England*, PP 1803-4, C.175; J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism* (London: 1969), 187.

²⁰ *Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws*, PP 1817, C.462. Attempts to revise the poor laws included Whitbread's bill in 1795.

the main report. Parish overseers were asked to respond to a range of questions including not only expenditure on relief and relief numbers, both indoor and outdoor, but also the employment of men, women and children, wage rates and labour schemes. In addition, they were asked for their views on issues such as the role of magistrates in making relief decisions and the recent rural unrest.²¹ Several flaws in the report have been noted by historians. Only a small number of parishes sent responses to the questionnaires, approximately ten per cent, and most did not answer all of the questions.²² There were also issues regarding the interpretation of questions which are discussed in the following chapter. Nevertheless, eleven of the sixteen study parishes sent replies and these are a valuable quantitative source and an important qualitative source as they provide a small but rare insight into the opinions of local officials. Following the implementation of the NPL, the Poor Law Commissioners issued annual reports and these have also been consulted for information on pauper numbers and relief expenditure.²³

Finally, Ministry of Health (MH) papers held at the National Archives have been referenced in the study. They include correspondence between the Assistant Poor Law Commissioners for Sussex and the Poor Law Commission, and the individual unions and the Central Authority. Letters from the first Assistant Commissioner for eastern Sussex, W. Hawley, describe the initial meetings of the new unions and include his views on individual parish officials and the new guardians. They also provide information on practices in parishes prior to the NPL and on the reaction of the guardians to some of the NPL policies. Later papers covering the 1840s and 1850s contain correspondence between the boards of guardians and the Poor Law Commission and, after 1847, the Poor Law Board. They include reports from Poor Law Inspectors and they refer to some of the correspondence between paupers and the Central Authority. These papers

²¹ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834.

²² N. Verdon, 'The Rural Labour Market in the Early Nineteenth Century: Women and Children's Employment, Family Income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review*, 55 (May, 2002), 303; M. Lyle, 'Regional agricultural wage variations in early nineteenth-century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 55 (2007), 95-106; A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke: 2002), 64.

²³ *A Return of the average annual expenditure of the parishes comprised in each of the unions in England and Wales...also the number of in-Door and out-Door paupers relieved during each of the quarters ended Lady-day 1841, 1842, and 1843*, PP 1844, C.241.

are a valuable source alongside the boards of guardians' minute books for assessing the relationship between local officials and the Central Authority as the NPL became established.²⁴

Methodology

Prior to working on the poor relief records, background information was collected from the 1841 census to compile record cards with the name, age and occupation of every household in each parish. These cards provide data on the number of men of working age, both single and with families, who were engaged in agricultural work plus the range of other occupations, and the number of children in each family, to assess whether there was a correlation between levels of relief and the proportion of agricultural households with large families. Working age was defined as sixteen and over with no upper limit as elderly men were often expected to continue working unless infirm.²⁵ The 1841 data has been used as a reference point throughout the study. However, additional information has been taken from the 1851 census including the size of farms and the number of labourers and the presence of 'living-in' servants on farms. As noted in Chapter Two, there is a debate within the historiography regarding whether there was a decline in labourers living with their employers in different regions. The 1851 and 1861 censuses have been used to investigate the life histories of individual relief recipients and officials.²⁶

A quantitative approach has been adopted to address questions regarding the number and profile of relief recipients. Due to the variable availability of sources, the main focus for the OPL period is on those people receiving outdoor relief. Relief recipients have been recorded by going through the overseers' accounts and recording each named individual. 'Names' rather than households have been noted as the records do not indicate whether those with a shared surname lived in the same house. It has been possible to create extensive datasets recording

²⁴ Recent work on MH papers has been published in: P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England, Bearing Witness* (Nottingham: 2020) and N. Carter and S. King, "'I think we ought not to acknowledge them [paupers] as that encourages them to write": the administrative state, power and the Victorian pauper', *Social History*, 46 (2021), 117-144.

²⁵ The 1832 government survey into poor relief refers to, 'women and children under 16', *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, (1834).

²⁶ While records have been made of individuals from the census, this study does not carry out a full family reconstitution which would not be viable when studying sixteen parishes. The scope of the study in terms of the number of parishes and the period covered makes intra-regional comparisons possible without needing to compile full family reconstitutions.

this information.²⁷ There are eleven parishes with several years of extant overseers' accounts covering the final three decades of the OPL and these form the basis for a comparative study of relief numbers in Sussex. This information is presented in a combination of figures and tables. The overseers' accounts often refer to men with children or with a family but where this information is not available, baptism lists have been consulted to establish whether men in the relief records had children. However, it is only possible to give a minimum number of male headed families, not all children can be traced as they may not have been baptised or they may have been baptised in another parish (see discussion above).

An assessment of the proportion of people who received regular or occasional relief is based on three parishes representing the Weald, the Downs and the town of Lewes which have records covering consecutive years between 1816 and 1828. In addition to considering intra-regional variations this study traces changes in the number of relief recipients over time under the OPL and across the Old and New Poor Laws. An increase in relief numbers has been noted in the historiography during the final years of the eighteenth century and therefore overseers' records and vestry minutes have been consulted from 1780 for several parishes and data for these earlier years has been added to the figures covering 1800-1835.²⁸ The number of people receiving relief in a workhouse during the OPL period is briefly discussed based primarily on data from the 1832 enquiries.

While the survival of sources which refer to relief numbers under the NPL is more variable for the study parishes than for the OPL period, some information on both outdoor and indoor numbers has been recorded in tabular form and comparisons have been made across the parishes and over time. It should be noted that when counting the number of relief recipients varying results will be obtained according to the sources used. Some records including the census, government enquiries and admission and discharge registers provide information on pauper numbers for one day. Yet the registers can also be used to obtain numbers entering the workhouse throughout the year and the parish and union ledgers recorded

²⁷ Historical sources varied when recording events over a year; the relief officials usually began and ended their accounts in March and therefore in most instances in the discussion calculations are made based on a year being, for example, March 1803 to March 1804 rather than January to December 1803. However, there are some exceptions to this where data has been obtained from certain parliamentary records which referred to a single year running from January to December.

²⁸ Those noting an increase in relief numbers include: G. Boyer, *An Economic History of the New Poor Law, 1750-1850* (New York: 1990), 24 and S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000), 82.

numbers/expenditure quarterly or every six months. Sources which record individuals in the workhouse over a period of time are likely to identify more people than those recording individuals at one moment in time. This issue has been noted in other studies.²⁹ When assessing how many people received support under the NPL, this study is unusual in being able to utilise lists of people who were relieved as a result of exceptions in the prohibitory orders, which were kept in the boards of guardians' minute books for two unions: Hailsham and Newhaven. The lists provide information on each application making it possible to address vital questions regarding how many individuals received exceptional relief, the value of that support and whether there is any evidence of labourers being paid 'ostensibly' for sickness (see discussion in Chapter Two).

A quantitative approach is also used to assess the provision of relief in terms of the number and profile of ratepayers and the amount of money raised to spend on parish welfare. Moreover, the same person could be both a ratepayer and a pauper during their lifetime. Rate books have survived for twelve of the parishes for the OPL period but for only four parishes for the NPL period. A record has been made of the total number of ratepayers and the number who were in property worth up to ten pounds, thirty pounds and over one hundred pounds in each parish in census years so that an estimate of the proportion of the population paying rates and paying higher rates can be obtained. For the OPL period data has been recorded for 1811, 1821 and 1831. This information provides a sense of the relative wealth in each parish. For the four parishes with extant rate books covering years during the NPL, the number of ratepayers and the amount raised is compared with the OPL period.³⁰

Quantitative information regarding relief numbers and costs is an important aspect of this study; yet, the aim is also to look in greater depth at the approach of officials towards the poor and to try to gain a sense of the pauper 'experience'. Some of the parish and union records include information on the type and range of support provided and this is examined in sections on the 'nature of relief'. Case studies are made of selected male-headed households who were

²⁹ Goose also notes that records such as the census only provide a snapshot at one point in time whereas other sources including admission and discharge registers can provide a fuller insight into relief numbers: Goose, 'Workhouse Populations', 64.

³⁰ The rates were rarely updated during this period; they were fairly consistent in the study parishes during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Ossification of rate lists could cause considerable friction in parishes, notably in the north. The number of people on the rate lists often remained static while the value of certain properties rose, leading ratepayers to question why some parishioners were not being asked to contribute to the rates: E. Midwinter, *Social Administration in Lancashire, 1830-1860* (Manchester: 1969).

in receipt of regular relief at the end of the OPL and during the early years of the NPL. The way that the poor were treated was closely aligned to their relationship with local officials and case studies have also been made of those administering relief prior to, and following, 1834. The occupation of overseers and later guardians is noted. In agricultural parishes relief officials were often farmers who employed many of the parishioners and would therefore have had an awareness of each individual's needs. They could be in a very invidious position as they balanced the interests of the poor with those of fellow employers and ratepayers within their parish. Information on the attitude of officials is gained from a range of sources including vestry minutes and boards of guardians' minute books, responses to the 1832 government enquiries, correspondence with the Poor Law Commissioners, and the letters and biographies discussed above.³¹

Background to the parishes

In this section the background to the study parishes is discussed with the aim of gaining an understanding of why poor relief levels and systems may have varied intra-regionally. As chapter one showed, this remains one of the thorniest problems in the question of how we understand the OPL in particular. Several factors may have affected levels of poverty in a parish and these are explored below. Firstly, location is discussed as the parishes need to be viewed and compared within a county and regional context. Understanding the physical location is also vital and it will be argued in this study that farming conditions were an important factor in determining poverty levels, in particular amongst agricultural labourers. In areas such as the Weald in Sussex where farming could be difficult, farms tended to be on a small scale with fewer opportunities for full employment. Therefore the extent of the parishes in terms of both acreage and population is discussed as well as farming economies, landownership and the size of farms and the size of the workforce. More detailed information on living conditions for parishioners is given including a brief discussion on whether common land was enclosed, the extent of 'living-in', labourers' wages and opportunities for women and children to work. Finally the discussion compares rural and town economies and in particular the range of occupations and associated opportunities for employment.

³¹ King argues that relief correspondence reveals a wide-ranging attitude of officials towards the poor from some who were focused on saving money and found it difficult to relate to the poor to those who were concerned to do their very best to support those requesting relief, King, *Writing the Lives*, 349.

Few studies of poor relief have made comparisons between several parishes or discussed them in terms of geology and farming conditions. King has carried out possibly the broadest overview of regional variations in poor relief and while he attributes differences in relief between macro-regions such as the north-west and the south-east to a range of social and economic factors, he also includes parish size and farming types within his comparisons. John Langton's work on Oxfordshire parishes makes a connection between the geology and farming conditions of a region and the nature of the relief system. His findings are discussed in the following chapter.³²

Map 3.1 Location of Sussex in the southeast of England (Pictures of England.com)



Sussex is a coastal county located in the southeast of England, a geologically diverse area.³³ Agricultural historians have emphasised the importance of considering agricultural regions that may go beyond county boundaries. Alan Everitt identified eight distinct agricultural areas in England which include two regions that predominate in the southeast and in Sussex; 'down and wold' country (the South Downs) and 'forest and wood pasture' (the Sussex Weald).³⁴ Downland extends across several southern and eastern counties including Surrey, Hampshire,

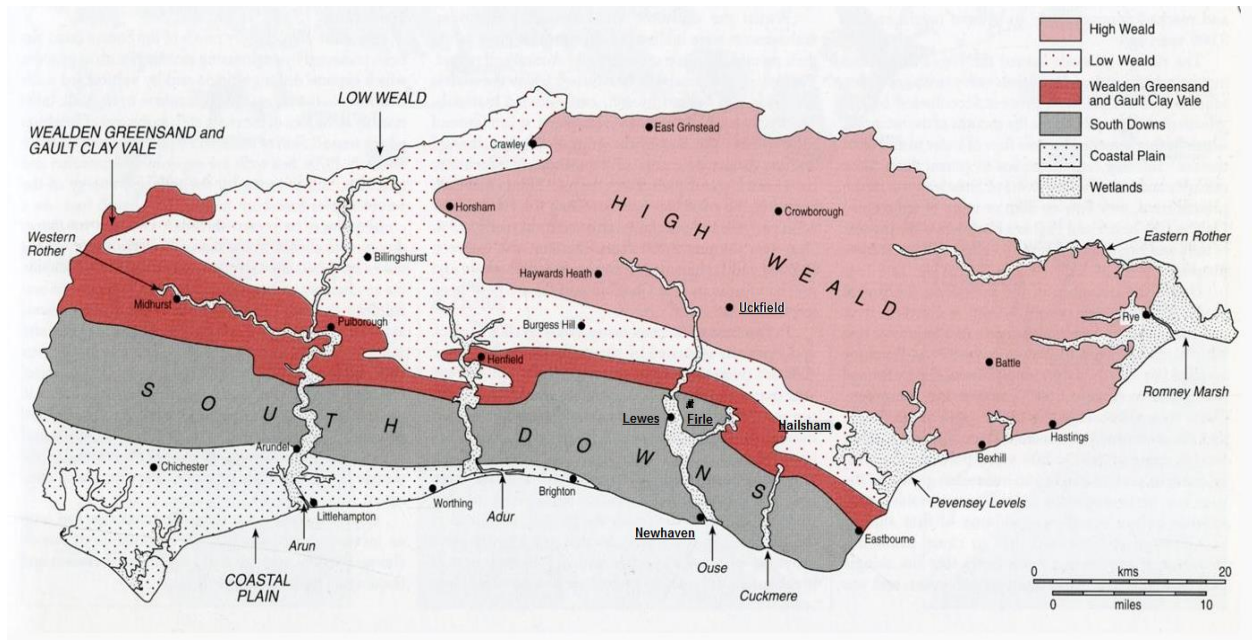
³² King, *Poverty and welfare*, 6; Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief'.

³³ The parameters of the southeast vary in poor relief studies. King includes six counties within a 'southern area' and seven counties within a 'south-eastern' sub-region: King, *Poverty and welfare*, 264-265. Brandon and Short describe a peninsula formed by the Thames and the English Channel incorporating Kent, Surrey and Sussex: P. Brandon and B. Short, *The South East from AD 100* (London: 1990).

³⁴ A. Everitt, 'Country, county and town: patterns of regional evolution in England', in A. Everitt (ed.), *Landscape and Community in England* (London: 1985).

Berkshire and Wiltshire while wood pasture extends into neighbouring Surrey and Kent. Thus the agricultural background to the study parishes discussed in this section may well have similarities to parishes in other southern and eastern counties.³⁵ The extent of the South Downs and the Weald in Sussex can be seen in Map 3.2.

Map 3.2 The geology of Sussex and the poor law unions referenced in this study (map produced by Susan Rowlands, published in: K.Leslie and B. Short (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Sussex* (Chichester: 1999)



The sixteen Sussex parishes selected for this study are located on the chalk downland, the greensand at the foot of the South Downs, the Low Weald and the High Weald.³⁶ The parishes are spread around five towns or villages which became union centres under the NPL in 1835.³⁷ They are Uckfield in the High Weald; Hailsham in the Low Weald; Fittlehampton at the foot of the Downs; Newhaven in the Ouse Valley of the Downs and Lewes which is also in the Ouse Valley. These five union centres are shown in Map 3.2. There are seven parishes in Lewes, only one, the

³⁵ Overton has identified the proportion of farms of varying acreage in 1851 by county. There were similarities in the range of farm sizes between the counties of Sussex, Kent and Essex. The counties with the highest proportion of larger farms were those with extensive downland including Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire: M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: the transformation of the agrarian economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: 1996), 175.

³⁶ The coastal plain shown on Map 3.1 had a distinct geology; it was an area of fertile soil and large-scale farms but is not included in this study as it covered western Sussex.

³⁷ Parishes in the wealden unions were located within two to six miles of the union towns with the exception of Rotherfield which was ten miles from Uckfield. The parishes in the downland unions were located between two and five miles from the union towns. The Lewes union comprised the seven parishes of Lewes.

parish of St John Sub Castro, is included in this study. Henceforth St John Sub Castro will be referred to as the Lewes parish.

In the nineteenth century Sussex was predominantly an agricultural county with many rural parishes of varying size and a number of market towns. The iron-making industry in the Weald had declined by this period. Coastal trade was important and eastern Sussex ports included Newhaven and Hastings. London was an important market for Sussex goods; the River Ouse was canalised in the 1790s enabling produce from the Weald as well as coastal areas to be transported via the port of Newhaven. Lewes was the county, market and borough town in eastern Sussex. It was the seat of the assizes and elections for East Sussex were held there. Small scale industries included tanyards, an iron foundry, paper mills and the dockyard.³⁸ Lewes was an important social and economic centre for the surrounding parishes; all of the study parishes are situated within a radius of twelve miles or less from Lewes, with the exception of Rotherfield in the High Weald which is eighteen miles distant. Lewes has therefore been included in this study so that comparisons can be made between a county town and the more rural surrounding parishes.

The size of the study parishes, both in terms of population and acreage, is shown in Table 3.1 below. When a parish has been described as a 'town' or 'village' in contemporary sources, this has been noted in the table.³⁹ In addition to Lewes, Hailsham and Uckfield in the Weald are both described as towns where petty sessions were held. Rotherfield in the Weald was a very large parish with over 3,000 inhabitants yet it was not described as a town but rather a large rural parish with only a handful of shops and three public houses. The remaining wealden parishes - Laughton, Chiddingly, Hellingly, East Hoathly and Waldron - were all rural villages with fairly scattered settlements. The study parishes on the Downs and at the foot of the Downs were smaller in acreage and population than those in the Weald with more compact settlement. Piddinghoe, Rodmell, Alciston, Berwick and Glynde were small rural villages with one or two shops and a public house. Rottingdean was a larger parish located on downland but

³⁸ C. Brent, *Georgian Lewes, 1714-1830* (Lewes: 1993), 27-41; P. Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald* (Chichester: 2003).

³⁹ Sources used for Table 3.1 are the 1841 censuses for each parish and the 1851 Post office Directory: *Post Office Directory of the Six Home Counties: Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex* (London: 1851). The Post Office Directory describes parishes as either a 'parish', 'village' or 'town'. Most 'towns' in the directory have a higher population, a wider range of shops and very often a market. For three of the parishes there is no reference to whether they were a town or village; these have been described in the table as a parish.

also on the coast. It was a bathing place (although far smaller than neighbouring Brighton) but predominantly a farming community. Newhaven is described as a town in the 1851 Directory by which time it had acquired a railway station. It was a seaport trading in coal, corn, timber, malt, fish, wine and spirits. The range in parish population sizes from a few hundred to several thousand is also evident in other southeastern counties. The most populous town in eastern Sussex was Brighton with a population of 24,000 in 1821. Short notes that it ranked fourth in density behind Dover in Kent, Southwark and Woolwich in the southeast.⁴⁰

Table 3.1 Size of parishes in terms of population and acreage, and whether they were considered to be a town or village in the mid-nineteenth century

Parish	Population from the 1841 censuses	Acreage showing woodland (w) and arable (a) recorded in the 1832 enquiries			Described as a town or village in the 1851 Post Office Directory
Hailsham W	1,586	6,350	257 (w)	1,410 (a)	town
Laughton W	850	4,110			village
Chiddingly W	930	5,200	760 (w)	2,400 (a)	village
Hellingly W	1,675	5,820	1,000 (w)	3,496 (a)	parish
Uckfield W	1,534	1,800			town
Rotherfield W	3,054	14,710	4,000 (w)	3,300 (a)	parish
East Hoathly W	607	2,000			village
Waldron W	1,065	6,500	2,500 (w)	2,300 (a)	parish
Newhaven D	1,265	1,000	0 (w)	400 (a)	town
Rottingdean D	988	3,000	0 (w)	1,800 (a)	village
Piddinghoe D	263	1,970			village
Rodmell D	360	1,650			village
Alciston D	266	1,835	30 (w)	785 (a)	village
Berwick D	203	1,250	0 (w)	474 (a)	village
Glynde D	276	1,551	50 (w)	350 (a)	village
Lewes	2,502	1,360	60 (w)	488 (a)	town

Information on acreage in the replies to the 1832 government enquiries refers to a mixture of arable and pasture land in both wealden and downland parishes. The main difference was that

⁴⁰ For parish populations see the responses to government enquires in 1832: *Report of His Majesty's commissioners, 1834*; B. Short, 'Population Change 1802-1851', in K. Leslie and B. Short (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Sussex* (Chichester: 1999), 88.

pasture was predominantly used for cattle in the Weald and sheep on the Downs. It is clear from Table 3.1 that during the period of study the Weald was more densely wooded compared to the eastern Downs. The farming economy of the Weald has traditionally been regarded as inferior to that of the downland, certainly by the period covered in this study. The wealden soils were of heavy clay and a challenge to farmers; much of the land was broken up into small fields shaded with oaks and often waterlogged. There were many scattered smallholdings and farms. Farming methods tended to be traditional; wheat growing depended on the old three course system allowing land to lie fallow for a year due to the heavy clays. Problems with transport were noted by those travelling in the area as the lanes and roads were often wet and muddy.⁴¹ However, not all commentators on the wealden economy have been negative. There was a more diverse economy than on the Downs including chicken farming, hop growing, brick making and winter coppicing. Roger Wells argues that woodland products such as hops, charcoal, faggots, and hoops could be profitable and that wealden farmers were not isolated as they attended local farmers' markets despite the poor roads.⁴²

Nevertheless, there is little dispute that the lighter downland soils were easier to manage than the wealden clays. Chalkland drains well and the ground was easier to plough. The farms were described by Arthur Young as more extensive compared with the Weald and with superior management.⁴³ South Downs sheep had been bred locally to produce high quality wool and mutton. By the mid-nineteenth century downland farmers were able to grow more produce by using the four course system growing root crops for feed instead of leaving the land fallow. The roads across the Downs to the local town of Brighton and to Lewes market were far more accessible than the wealden lanes. Better farming conditions on the Downs led to the consolidation of farms by capitalist farmers in the early-nineteenth century who were able to invest in improvements in their farms.⁴⁴ Landowners, including the Abergavennys, Pelhams, Gages and Trevors, leased out land to affluent yeomen such as the Tourles in Lewes and the Ellmans in Glynde. These tenant farmers were able to make considerable profits without

⁴¹ The 1833 Select Committee on Agricultural Distress reported that the worst economic distress was in the Weald with little winter work for labourers and more people receiving poor relief: *Report from the select committee on agricultural distress*, PP, 1833, C.612; Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald*.

⁴² Brandon also referred to the positive comments about life in the Weald made by both William Cobbett and Arthur Young: Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald*. R. Wells, 'Social Protest, Class, Conflict and Consciousness, in the English Countryside, 1700-1880' in M. Reed and R. Wells (eds.), *Class, Conflict and protest in the English Countryside 1700-1880* (London: 1990), 123.

⁴³ Rev. A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex* (Devon: 1813), 23.

⁴⁴ P. Brandon, *The South Downs* (Chichester: 1998).

actually owning the land.⁴⁵ As will be seen in the following chapters, it was generally the tenant farmers rather than the landowners who were highly influential on the parish vestries and as administrators of poor relief.

There were fewer, much larger farms on the Downs compared with the Weald. Table 3.2 below uses data from the 1841 census to show the number of farms and the number of agricultural labourers in each parish.⁴⁶ The table indicates that a smaller number of farmers employed a higher number of labourers on the Downs. The difference in the size of landholdings and the ability of farmers to employ more men on the South Downs farms is very significant in terms of this discussion on poor relief as these wealthier landowners were better placed to retain their workers during the winter months and during periods of economic downturn.⁴⁷ Apfel and Dunkley noted in their study of rural Bedfordshire that when there was a labour surplus small farmers were unable to hire additional men and it was only the wealthier farmers who could 'find productive use for additional hands'.⁴⁸

However, Table 3.2 also indicates that there were variations in the number of farms and labourers within the Weald and across the downland parishes. For example there were only nine farms in East Hoathly, far fewer than most of the other wealden parishes although East Hoathly was unusual as most of the parish was owned by one family, the Pelhams. The town of Uckfield also had few farms but 123 agricultural labourers. One of the farmers is listed as a member of the gentry with property valued at approximately £100 suggesting that his farm may have been of a considerable size.⁴⁹ Other examples of larger farms in the Weald include that of Robert Reeves in Chiddingly which was over 500 acres, although Reeves only employed

⁴⁵ Mingay argued that it was not always in the interest of tenant farmers on large scale farms to own the land; they were able to benefit from improving the land: G. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (London: 1976), 54.

⁴⁶ The number of farms/farmers is based on the number of people listed in the 1841 censuses who were described as farmers. There are issues with the reliability of responses to the 1841 census as the head of the household might have had a trade such as a smith or beer-seller but may also have worked on a smallholding or farm. The 1851 census is a more reliable source as farmers were often listed with the number of their employees.

⁴⁷ It is difficult to find information on how labourers were occupied in the winter months. Bob Copper described his grandfather's work on a farm in Rottingdean in the mid-nineteenth century where over sixty men were employed. Threshing was carried out in November, in mid-winter there was cleaning and maintenance work around the stables and yards, care of stock and horses, digging dew ponds and some winter sowing: B. Copper, *A Song for every season* (Peacehaven: 1971).

⁴⁸ W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Laws: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10, (1985), 62, 63.

⁴⁹ *Post Office Directory, 1851*.

twenty four labourers and some of his land may have been woodland (see below).⁵⁰ Similarly not all farms in the downland parishes were large and two adjacent parishes, Alciston and Berwick appear to have had farming enterprises on a different scale. It is possible that the one farm in Alciston employed ninety four labourers but it could be that some of the labourers travelled outside the parish to work.⁵¹ On the other hand Berwick had four farms employing almost half the number of labourers as Alciston.

Table 3.2 Number of farmers, agricultural labourers and 'living in' farm labourers in each parish in 1841⁵²

Parish	Population 1841	Acreage with woodland and arable shown in brackets			Common -land in acres	Number of farms/ farmers	Number of agricultural labourers	Number of 'living in' labourers
Hailsham W	1,586	6,350	257 (w)	1,410 (a)	80	34	147	1 in 1 farm
Laughton W	850	4,110				23	141	20 in 8 farms
Chiddingly W	930	5,200	760 (w)	2,400 (a)	0	31	138	30 in 14 farms
Hellingly W	1,675	5,820	1,000 (w)	3,496 (a)	4	40	104	27 in 14 farms
Uckfield W	1,534	1,800				3	123	-
Rotherfield W	3,054	14,710	4,000 (w)	3,300 (a)	600	126	425	59 in 28 farms
East Hoathly W	607	2,000				9	76	-
Waldron W	1,065	6,500	2,500 (w)	2,300 (a)	150	38	156	3 in 3 farms
Newhaven D	1,265	1,000	0 (w)	400 (a)	0	4	27	-
Rottingdean D	988	3,000	0 (w)	1,800 (a)	0	5	131	3 in 2 farms
Piddinghoe D	263	1,970				2	62	-
Rodmell D	360	1,650				3	63	-
Alciston D	266	1,835	30 (w)	785 (a)	0	1	94	-
Berwick D	203	1,250	0 (w)	474 (a)	0	4	54	-
Glynde D	276	1,551	50 (w)	350 (a)	0	2	48	-
Lewes	2,502	1,360	60 (w)	488 (a)	0	4	51	4 in 2 farms

Further information on the size of farms and their workforce is available in the 1851 census which gives details of how many men each farmer employed. The census has been used to provide comparative information on two parishes with similar populations and acreages;

⁵⁰ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), *Chiddingly Census, 1851*.

⁵¹ There are references to labourers from the Weald travelling to other parishes to work: Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald*, 186. It is possible that labourers from Alciston worked outside of the parish although no direct references have been found.

⁵² Data on acreage and land-type is taken from the 1832 enquiries, other data is taken from the 1841 census for each parish.

Chiddingly in the Weald and Rottingdean on the Downs.⁵³ The results again demonstrate that, while there were exceptions, the trend was for farms in the Weald to be smaller in size providing employment for fewer labourers. In Chiddingly twenty-seven farmers were listed in the 1851 census of whom over half had a very small workforce. Robert Reeves, mentioned above, farmed 524 acres and employed the highest number of labourers, twenty-four. There were eight other farmers who employed between nine and twenty men but fourteen farmers employed fewer than four men. Four families appear to have worked alone or with family support. It should be noted that it was not only the farm labourers on these small-scale farms who were vulnerable in times of economic downturn but also the farmers themselves.⁵⁴ In contrast, in Rottingdean one farmer, Charles Beard, had acquired 2010 acres of land and employed ninety-six labourers; two other farmers with over 400 acres employed twenty-one and eighteen labourers. A fourth farmer employed nine labourers and a fifth was listed but without information on the land he farmed or his employees.⁵⁵

The above information concerning the size of parishes and the number of farms would indicate that the more scattered settlements in the Weald had many elements of an 'open' parish while the small, compact downland parishes equate with the definition of a 'closed' parish.⁵⁶ Short noted that approximately seventy per cent of parishes in the High Weald and sixty five per cent of parishes in the Low Weald, 'were essentially open'.⁵⁷ There were some large estates in the Weald and traditionally gentry families had been attracted to owning forest land with the hunting opportunities this afforded. The study parish of East Hoathly formed part of the estate of the Pelham family. However, these estates were the exception. On the other hand there were several examples of downland parishes that could be described as 'closed' and also

⁵³ While the acreage for Chiddingly was larger, most of the difference was made up from woodland.

⁵⁴ Sheppard's work on Small Farms in Chiddingly found that between 1815 and 1842 there was a forty-seven per cent decline in small farms due partly to the cost of poor rates and also a lack of capital/supplementary income. J. Sheppard, 'Small Farms in a Sussex Weald Parish, 1800-60', *Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), 127-141. Horn found that many small scale farmers purchased land at high prices during the prosperous war years but were unable to maintain payments in the following years of agricultural depression: P. Horn, *The Rural World 1780-1850: Social Change in the English countryside* (London: 1980), 73.

⁵⁵ ESRO, *Chiddingly Census, 1851; Rottingdean Census, 1851*. The results from the 1851 census show a similar pattern to those of the 1841 census suggesting that the latter can be regarded as a reliable source when considering the number of farmers and labourers.

⁵⁶ Reference was made to the terms 'open' and 'closed' parishes in the nineteenth century. Parishes with only one or a few landowners were described as 'closed' parishes where the building of cottages was often restricted to reduce settlement. 'Open' parishes were more densely populated with several smaller landholdings; inhabitants often travelled to work in the 'closed' parishes: B. Holderness, 'Open and Close Parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Agricultural History Review* (1972), 126-139.

⁵⁷ Short, *The South East from AD 1000*, 214.

'estate villages' with only one landowner including Rodmell, Alciston, Berwick and Glynde; while most of the land in Piddinghoe was owned by the Pelham family. In marked contrast land in the town of Lewes had no dominant landowner by the early-nineteenth century after Thomas Pelham sold his town property.⁵⁸ The pattern of landownership could have a significant impact on communities; residents in 'open' parishes often had more freedom than those in estate or 'closed' villages where there might be certain restrictions such as access to alehouses. There was a tradition of non-conformity in wealden areas and also in Lewes.⁵⁹ The difference between more 'open' or 'closed' communities also had an impact on poor relief administration. As will be seen in Chapter Five, there was greater resistance from the wealden and Lewes parishes to interference from central government during the imposition of the NPL. There was also considerably more Swing activity in the Weald.⁶⁰

Byung Song has highlighted a relationship between parish types and relief levels. His study of Oxfordshire found that in the 'closed' parishes relatively generous, regular pensions were given predominantly to the elderly and infirm. However, overall spending was higher in 'open' parishes; one reason for this was that indoor provision (which was costlier than outdoor provision) was more common in these communities. It will be seen in Chapter Four that there may well have been a connection between parish types and poor relief in Sussex as spending was also higher in the 'open' parishes where workhouses were more likely to be used. Larger relief lists in 'open' parishes were also indicated in replies to the 1832 enquiries from other southeastern counties including Kent and Essex where respondents noted that parishes with considerably divided property had a high number of labourers unemployed and needing support.⁶¹

However, Holderness suggested that the picture presented by Victorian commentators of labourers having to travel from 'open' to 'closed' parishes to work may have been exaggerated; most surplus labour was based in towns.⁶² All of the Sussex study parishes indicated having a surplus of agricultural labourers suggesting that regular travel between parishes to work was

⁵⁸ Brent, *Georgian Lewes*, 194.

⁵⁹ Mingay, *Rural Life*, 18; John Vickers, *An Historical Atlas*, 76.

⁶⁰ Short, *The South East from AD 1000*, 237.

⁶¹ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834.

⁶² B. Song, 'Parish Typology and the Operation of the Poor Laws in Early Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire', *Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 203-224; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834; Holderness, 'Open and Close parishes', 133.

unlikely.⁶³ The one exception was during harvest time when wealden labourers sometimes obtained work on the Downs and then returned home to the harvest which occurred slightly later due to the colder soils.⁶⁴ There are also examples from the OPL records of individuals with settlements in the rural parishes receiving relief while they resided in the town of Lewes and several paupers with a settlement in Rottingdean were living in the town of Brighton along the coast, thus supporting Holderness's conjecture.⁶⁵ James Caird commented on the importance of coastal resorts in Sussex compared with other southern counties as they provided alternative employment. This was more likely to help downland communities near the sea.⁶⁶

The consolidation of landed estates during the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth centuries often involved enclosing land including common land. In Sussex considerable enclosure had taken place before 1700; however, there were also a number of parliamentary enclosure acts in the county in the early-nineteenth century. Some common land remained, notably in the Ashdown Forest in the High Weald in the vicinity of the study parish of Rotherfield and on the Dicker Common near Hailsham. There were similar stretches of heath and common that remained unenclosed in neighbouring Surrey.⁶⁷ There was little common land on the Downs; the small common at Telscombe near Rottingdean was an exception. Figure 3.2 indicates how much common land remained in the study parishes which sent responses to the government enquiries in 1832; only the wealden parishes reported its presence. The importance of commons in providing resources such as fuel and wild food as part of a makeshift economy was discussed in the previous chapter. The retention of some common land in the Weald supports the notion that the poor in this area could access a wider range of resources than those in downland parishes although any advantage may have been negated by the higher populations in the Weald.

⁶³ Responses from the 1832 enquiries indicated that each parish had a surplus of labourers, *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834. However, Griffin has identified at least one example in western Sussex where labourers travelled to work from a number of 'closed' parishes to the neighbouring 'open' parish of Southwick; C. Griffin, *The Rural War*, 41.

⁶⁴ Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald*, 186.

⁶⁵ Assistant Commissioner Hawley commented that the Newhaven union was in the vicinity of Brighton which could, 'absorb superabundant labour': The National Archives (TNA), Correspondence to the Central Authority of the Poor Law, Newhaven union, 1835-42, MH 12/13046. The Chiddingly overseers' accounts provide examples of individuals with a settlement in Chiddingly receiving relief in Lewes: ESRO, Chiddingly Overseers' accounts, 1827-1835, P/292/8/4.

⁶⁶ Horn, *The Rural World*, 243.

⁶⁷ Short, *The South East from AD 1000*, 214.

Additional information in Table 3.2 concerns whether any farm labourers were 'living-in' the farms where they worked. The data is based on agricultural labourers who were living with a farmer but with a different surname in the 1841 census. As noted in Chapter Two, Short has argued that the practice of in-service on farms continued well into the nineteenth century in parts of Sussex, notably the Weald. This is important as men 'living-in' were likely to have had more secure employment than those living independently. Table 3.2 supports Short as four wealden parishes had several farms with 'living-in' male labourers. The average age of these labourers in Laughton and Chiddingly was twenty or younger whereas in Hellingly and Rotherfield there was a wider age range with several men in their thirties and above. Short found that in the Ashdown Forest in Sussex the ages of men 'living-in' was, 'commonly given as fifteen, although this could have meant that they were anything up to nineteen years of age.'⁶⁸ The older age range in Hellingly and Rotherfield suggests a more traditional practice in these parishes.⁶⁹ Mick Reed has argued that 'living-in' farm servants exercised an element of control in their relationship with their employers as they were able to move on if they were not satisfied with their working conditions.⁷⁰

While some wealden labourers may have been less vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations in employment if they were living on the farm where they worked, it will be seen in this study that unemployment was far more prevalent in the wealden parishes which challenges Reed's argument that farm servants may have held the upper hand in their relationship with employers. Table 3.3 below shows the responses to questions regarding seasonal employment from the eleven study parishes which sent replies to the 1832 government enquiries. It is apparent from this table that more labourers were unemployed in the wealden parishes, particularly in the winter, and that farmers in some of the downland parishes were able to offer work to women and children in the winter and summer. The connection between good farming conditions and high employment is made by the respondent from Rottingdean who noted that the farmers were able to offer employment to almost all the women and children, 'in

⁶⁸ B. Short, 'The Decline of Living-In Servants in the Transition to Capitalist Farming', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 122, (1984), 147-164. Short noted that in most parishes some other trades such as blacksmiths or butchers had apprentices living-in. This is also evident in the 1841 parish censuses.

⁶⁹ However, patterns of 'living-in' may well have varied across the country and occurred for different reasons. Gritt argued that in Lancashire 'living-in' farm service increased between the late-eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century and was intrinsic to agricultural development rather than evidence of a traditional or 'ossified' practice: A. Gritt, 'The survival of service in the English agricultural labour force: lessons from Lancashire, c. 1650-1851', *The Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 25-50.

⁷⁰ M. Reed, 'Social Change and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England', in *Class, Conflict and Protest*, 102-3.

consequence of the land being of a light soil.’⁷¹ In the following chapters it will be seen that unemployment was a more serious issue in many wealden parishes compared with the downland parishes and that there was an element of ‘seasonality’ in the demand for poor relief. There were several years when men required support due to having no work in the winter months and the total number of relief payments was generally higher in the winter.⁷²

Average weekly wages were also given in the 1832 enquiries and as can be seen in Table 3.3 these were very similar across the parishes indicating that higher relief levels in wealden parishes were likely to be a result of lack of employment rather than lower pay. It is interesting to note in the reply from the Newhaven official that agricultural labourers were paid considerably less than other labourers which is further evidence that agricultural communities were particularly susceptible to poverty in this period. Responses from other Sussex parishes indicated a similar rate of pay across the county ranging between 10s. and 14s.⁷³ In fact the study parish of Berwick was exceptional in paying up to 18s. in the summer. The wage rate for agricultural labourers in Sussex appears to have been favourable compared with other counties in the early-1830s with only farmers in Surrey and Kent paying higher wages.⁷⁴ Yet, most labourers struggled to maintain any form of subsistence on their wages. Horn has argued that farmers were reluctant to raise wages when food prices were high, for example during the French wars, as it could be difficult to cut them when prices returned to more normal levels.⁷⁵ It will be seen in the following chapter that the poor were often given supplementary relief in kind rather than a rise in relief pensions for the same reason.

⁷¹ *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners, 1834, 522a.*

⁷² For example, in the wealden parish of Laughton 112 separate payments were made in July 1825 compared with 140 in January 1826: ESRO, Laughton overseers’ accounts, 1682-1921, PAR/409/31/1.

⁷³ *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners, 1834.*

⁷⁴ K. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England* (Cambridge: 1985), 130. Snell’s data on wage rates is taken from Bowley who quoted from appendices to the 1832 enquiries.

⁷⁵ Horn, *The Rural World*, 46.

Table 3.3 Responses to the 1832 enquiries regarding agricultural employment and wages in the study parishes

Parish	Question 6. The number of labourers generally out of work in the summer and winter	Questions 11./12. Employment for women and children in the summer and winter	Question 8. Weekly wages with, and without, Beer or Cider, in summer and in winter
Hailsham W	Summer 0 ; winter 60	Only in the summer	12s. in summer and winter
Chiddingly W	Summer 15; winter 25	Only in the summer - includes hop picking	12s. in summer and winter without beer
Hellingly W	Summer up to 70; winter 100	Summer a little - includes hop picking	12s. in summer and winter without beer
Rotherfield W	Summer 10; winter 120	Very little	Summer 12s. winter 10s.
Waldron W	Summer 10-12; winter very few due to work in woodland	Summer and winter shaving hop poles in winter	Summer and winter piecework or 2s. for daywork
Newhaven D	Summer few; winter few	Only summer	14s. in summer, 12s. in winter agricultural labourers. Other labourers 17s. 6d. and 15s.
Rottingdean D	None	Summer and winter	12s. a week in summer and winter, beer in summer
Alciston D	Summer 5; winter 5-10	Only summer	12s. in summer and winter with beer
Berwick D	None	Summer and winter	12s. – 18s. in summer 9s. – 12s. in winter
Glynde D	None	Summer and winter	12s. in summer and winter
Lewes	Summer now and then	Only summer	12s. in summer and winter

In addition to intra-regional differences in poor relief between geographically diverse regions in eastern Sussex, this study is also concerned with any apparent variations in relief levels between towns and rural parishes. In the following chapter it will be seen that proportionately fewer people received support from relief officials in the towns of Lewes and Newhaven. In her study of relief in Shefford and Campton in Bedfordshire Williams also found that in the town fewer people were relieved quite possibly due to the wider range of employment opportunities.⁷⁶ Table 3.4 below shows the percentage of working men employed in agriculture

⁷⁶ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*.

in the study towns and villages and also the range of different occupations available in 1841. The towns of Lewes and Newhaven had a far smaller proportion of agricultural labourers than the other parishes which may well account for lower relief levels. The wealden towns of Uckfield and Hailsham had slightly lower percentages than other wealden parishes but agriculture was clearly an important part of their economies. Lewes had the widest range of occupation; many of these would have provided more secure employment or even alternative employment to farm work.

However, there was a range of occupations other than agriculture in all of the parishes and certain skills predominated; for example, in Rotherfield there were seventeen blacksmiths and in Hellingly twenty brick-makers. A number of historians discuss the rural economy in the nineteenth century in terms of a tripartite system of landowner, tenant farmer and labourer.⁷⁷ Mick Reed has challenged this concept arguing that a large group of people in the countryside did not fit into these categories; notably small-scale farmers, smallholders, craftsmen and village tradesmen.⁷⁸ The Sussex censuses provide some support for Reed. The number of smallholders, notably in the Weald in Sussex, has already been noted. The Sussex evidence also indicates that craftsmen were important in even the smallest parishes. In Alciston where eighty-five per cent of male occupations were in agriculture there were also two wheelwrights, three cordwainers, two smiths and a shoemaker. In the small towns trades including tailors, saddlers and grocers were important.⁷⁹ It will be seen in the following chapter that while the majority of relief recipients were agricultural labourers, a small number of craftsmen and tradesmen in the Sussex parishes also received poor relief.

⁷⁷ Overton, *Agricultural Revolution*, 203; E. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London: 1968), 98; P. Horn, *The Changing Countryside in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales* (London: 1984), 10.

⁷⁸ Reed, 'Social change', 5.

⁷⁹ Horn has recorded trades in a number of counties using the 1851 census. In small Suffolk parishes of a similar size to the smallest study parishes here there were a similar range of crafts and trades practised. The main difference in Horn's selected counties is the number of people engaged in small industries such as lacemaking in Buckinghamshire which were not available in Sussex: Horn, *The Rural World*, 226. Walker has found that trades including carpentry, bricklaying and brick-making expanded in Sussex during the nineteenth century due to the demand for housebuilding from expanding coastal towns: L. Walker, preliminary reports and papers on 'The occupational Structure of Britain 1379-1911', *The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure*, <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk>.

Table 3.4 Proportion of male employees working in agriculture, the range of other occupations, and the proportion of larger families in the parishes in 1841

Parish	Described as a town or village	% of working males occupied in farming	Number of different occupations	% of families with more than three children
Hailsham W	town	42	63	43
Laughton W	village	72	27	46
Chiddingly W	village	62	33	48
Hellingly W	parish	50	54	40
Uckfield W	town	33	73	35
Rotherfield W	parish	68	47	40
East Hoathly W	village	45	49	44
Waldron W	parish	68	33	41
Newhaven D	town	11	52	31
Rottingdean D	village	55	32	32
Piddinghoe D	village	70	16	37
Rodmell D	village	64	20	52
Alciston D	village	85	15	41
Berwick D	village	78	12	54
Glynde D	village	58	15	40
Lewes	town	9	96	41

One source of income which would not have been recorded as an occupation in the census was smuggling which was prevalent in the coastal county of Sussex. There are references to smuggling in several of the study parishes; in Rottingdean it was such an issue that a number of coastguard cottages were built and twenty-eight coast guards were recorded in the 1841 census. As will be seen in the following chapter, it was a concern to the overseers in Hailsham who threatened to remove allowances to any paupers caught smuggling. Griffin notes that the Swing activities in 1830 in parts of Sussex were carried out by parishioners who were ‘principally smugglers’. When forming groups or gangs men were afforded the opportunity to ‘organise’ and join in concerted action which was essential during the riots. Griffin also points out that poaching and smuggling gangs offered one of the few alternatives to immiseration.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Brandon, *The South Downs*, 126; Griffin, *The Rural War*, 95.

Table 3.4 also includes data on the number of children in families in the parishes. As discussed in the previous chapter, large families, notably within agricultural communities, were often seen by those opposing the poor laws to be a consequence of too liberal a relief system and also a drain on that system. It is therefore interesting to see that there was not a notable difference between the number of large families in the predominantly agricultural parishes compared with the town parishes. On the other hand, it will be argued in Chapter Four that having dependents did make a difference to relief numbers and more families accessed relief in the rural parishes, notably in the Weald. It is also important to note that when looking at individual relief records, families with many children (sometimes between seven and ten) in all the parishes appeared on the overseers' accounts. While this does not prove that the relief system caused people to have large families, it does indicate that having many children was a problem in times of economic hardship.

It is evident from the above discussion that the choice of parishes and their location is a very important consideration in any study of poor relief. It is also essential to place the parishes within a wider regional context. In this section it has been argued that woodland areas experienced more poverty than open downland in the southeast; farms in the former tended to be on a smaller scale offering less regular employment. The examination of Sussex parishes gives some weight to the suggestion that 'closed' and 'open' parishes affected relief levels as single landownership in several downland parishes led to large-scale farming enterprises offering more secure employment but also resulting in smaller parish populations. Less favourable farming conditions in the Weald were recognised by contemporary commentators including those involved in determining relief policies.⁸¹ This section has shown that presenting the Weald as in all respects inferior to the Downs would be too simplistic as the former had a wider range of resources and some of the parishioners possibly greater freedom than their neighbours on the Downs. This is a reminder that relief studies must take into account the makeshift economies of the poor and consider the availability of sources of income/employment beyond agriculture in rural parishes.⁸²

⁸¹ Young, *General View; Report from His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834, 515a; 522a; *Third report from the select committee appointed to inquire into the state of agriculture*, PP 1836, C.465, 193.

⁸² French discussed the increasing dependence of agricultural labourers on poor relief to supplement their wages in the first decades of the nineteenth century. He took into account the contribution of women and children to the family income but did not identify any other means of subsistence, French, 'How dependent?'

Nevertheless, it is apparent in the following chapters that wealden parishes clearly experienced higher levels of poverty. Few have questioned contemporary concerns that poverty was a notable issue in the Weald, that downland communities experienced less unemployment in the period under study and that there were consequently intra-regional variations in the demand on the parish relief systems. However, so far no attempts have been made to quantify those variables by close study of the poor law records. The following chapters do just that and extend the assessment of poor relief in Sussex into the NPL period.

Chapter Four

Relief under the Old Poor Law, 1800-1834

Introduction

Chapter Four focuses on the provision of poor relief in eastern Sussex parishes during the final decades of the OPL. An in-depth assessment of the number and profile of relief recipients and the scale, nature and duration of their support is carried out in order to compare the OPL system with welfare under the NPL in the following two chapters. Attention is also paid to those supplying relief - the ratepayers and relief officials. Consideration is given to the issue of intra-regional variations in relief which has been much debated in the historiography and was noted in the previous chapters.¹ It is also important to assess whether Sussex fits into a broader regional welfare pattern. The southeast of England was an area associated with high levels of spending on relief and the following discussion suggests that there were parishes in eastern Sussex, notably in the Weald, with costly relief systems which potentially fitted the regional pattern. However, this was not the case with all of the parishes, notably those on the South Downs. At the same time this research supports the notion that there were differences between neighbouring communities within the same geographic locations and also between rural and town economies in eastern Sussex. The reasons for such inconsistencies are explored below. One of the notable differences between relief lists in the Weald and on the Downs was the inclusion of high numbers of agricultural labourers and their families in the former. Therefore particular focus is given to this group throughout the study.

Within the historiography the final three to four decades of the OPL is often referred to as a 'crisis' period because of a series of poor harvests, high food prices and a post-war recession which had a notable impact on agricultural labourers and their families. Any changes in the welfare system across this considerable period of time need to be analysed in the following discussion.² The varying views in the historiography regarding the public perception of the poor

¹ S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000); S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: 2004), 283.

² Baugh discussed the impact of poor harvests and unemployment between 1800 and the 1820s on relief systems; D. Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790-1834', *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975); Hollen

by the early-nineteenth century are taken into account. Were labourers with families viewed in a negative light as suggested by Lynn Hollen Lees or were relief officials able to maintain a flexible and even generous approach towards parishioners as King has proposed?³ This chapter aims to throw light on the inter-relationship between agricultural labourers and parish officials to assess whether any increase in pressure on individual relief systems, combined with events such as rural unrest, had an impact on this relationship.

As part of this discussion of intra-regional differences in eastern Sussex, comparisons are made with a number of studies from other regions. Two have been selected for more in-depth comparison: Henry French's work on Terling in Essex and Samantha Williams' assessment of relief in two Bedfordshire parishes (which were briefly discussed in Chapter Two). They considered welfare systems in the southeast and the East Midlands within similar time frames to this study and made use of overseers' accounts to record all poor law payments within the parishes. There are some differences as both French and Williams used full family reconstitutions which would be unrealistic when researching sixteen parishes, some of which had between one and two thousand parishioners. French's study did not attempt intra-regional comparisons as he only considered one parish. However, Terling was a rural, agricultural parish during the early-nineteenth century and French paid particular attention to the profile of relief recipients including male-headed families. Williams is unusual in having carried out an intra-regional comparison of poor relief although she only looked at two parishes. However, as she examined a rural and a town community her study provides important comparisons with this assessment of varying economies in eastern Sussex.⁴

The chapter has been divided into three sections: information on the number and profile of relief recipients and the duration of their relief; the nature of relief including relief in cash and kind, employment, support for children and indoor relief; and the supply of relief which considers the ratepayers, how much money was available to support the poor and the approach of officials and the vestry towards the poor. It is essential throughout this study to try to gain some insight into the individuals involved in both administering and receiving support

Lees regards this as a crisis period when the poor became marginalised as their numbers grew: L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: 1998), 82.

³ Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 82-111; King, *Poverty and welfare*, 175.

⁴ H. French, 'How dependent were the "dependent poor"? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834', *Continuity and Change*, 30 (2015); S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Suffolk: 2011).

and therefore case studies of paupers are included within the section on the nature of relief and of officials in the section on the supply of relief.

4.1: Relief recipients.

Given the contemporary accounts of far higher levels of poverty in the Weald than on the Downs, one likely intra-regional difference would have been a higher number of people being supported in wealden parishes.⁵ This section assesses the scale of the welfare systems in the study parishes during the final decades of the OPL in terms of the number of households in receipt of relief. Comparison is made between each parish and more broadly between the regions of the Weald, the Downs and the town of Lewes. The names on the overseers' lists have been counted and discussed as a proportion of the population which is important as the parishes varied considerably in size. The profile of relief recipients is considered including the number of men with and without dependents. The historiography has found that agricultural labourers, in particular those with large families, struggled to subsist independently during the final decades of the OPL and where possible occupations have been noted.⁶ Records from the 1780s are available for some of the parishes and these have been included in this section of the thesis so that the timing of any changes in the number and profile of paupers can be traced. Questions are also asked regarding the duration of relief; whether support was provided on a short-term, temporary basis or over an extended period of time. As the range and survival of overseers' records varies, Table 4.1 below shows which of the parishes can be used to address the key questions in this section on relief recipients.

⁵ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws*, PP 1834, C.44, 515a; 522a; *Third report from the select committee appointed to inquire into the state of agriculture*, PP 1836, C.465, 193.

⁶ King notes that within the historiography the period after 1790 has been regarded as a time of 'crisis' due to male-dominated poverty in the south and east: King, *Poverty and welfare*, 126. French also found an increase in men with families on the relief lists by 1800: French, 'How dependent?'

Table 4.1 Key showing which parishes have data that has been used to address each question on relief numbers in this section⁷

Question	1821 census	The number and profile of relief recipients in each parish	Changes in relief numbers over time	Whether relief was short-term or long-term
Hailsham W	1278	x	x	x
Laughton W	731	x	x	
Chiddingly W	870	x	x	
Hellingly W	1313	x	x	
Uckfield W	1099			
Rotherfield W	2770	x	x	
East Hoathly W	510			
Waldron W	965			
Newhaven D	927	x	x	
Rottingdean D	772			
Piddinghoe D	251	x	x	
Rodmell D	336			
Alciston D	247	x	x	
Berwick D	172	x	x	x
Glynde D	250	x	x	
Lewes	1795	x	x	x

It is important to clarify what is understood by assessing the ‘number’ of people in receipt of relief. Where possible, both outdoor and indoor poor are included, although the majority of people listed in the overseers’ records were supported in their homes. Not all of the parishes had workhouses at this time and those that did tended to refer to the total number of paupers in receipt of relief rather than distinguishing between indoor and outdoor poor within their accounts. If separate workhouse or poor house records were kept for the study parishes they have not survived or only partially in some instances. Fortunately, there are references to the

⁷ The parishes are grouped to indicate that they were located in close proximity in similar geographical regions; the letters W and D indicate whether they were in the Weald or close to/on the Downs. Each group later became part of one of the New Poor Law Unions. The parish populations from the 1821 censuses are included in the table as a reminder of the relative demography of each parish. Parishes which have fewer extant records will be included within the general discussion.

names of workhouse residents in the overseers' accounts and in the 1821 or 1831 censuses which are available for some parishes. A more detailed discussion of indoor relief will be included in the section on the nature of relief below.⁸

Out-parishioners, those with a settlement in the parish who were living elsewhere, also need to be taken into account. King has pointed out that not all overseers kept an account of payments to out-parishioners and this could considerably affect any calculation of the size of relief lists. Indeed, in some northern industrial areas up to forty per cent of relief recipients were living beyond the parish while recent studies of pauper correspondence have demonstrated that this applied to considerable numbers of people in parts of the southeast.⁹ The accounts for most of the study parishes refer to paupers living in neighbouring parishes and sometimes further afield in London or Kent and these are included in the calculations of relief numbers. In Lewes where the incidence of out-parishioners was highest, probably because several paupers lived only streets away from their parish of settlement, a total of fifty-three non-resident individuals or families have been identified from the St John Sub Castro overseers' records for the period 1816-1834. At Hailsham the figure was ten per cent of relief recipients between 1800 and 1834 and in other parishes it ranged from three per cent in Berwick to seven per cent in Newhaven.¹⁰

The importance of including family members or dependents when discussing relief numbers has been highlighted, although identifying whether men were single or had families from the overseers' records is not straightforward. Some accounts include the number and names of any dependents but in many instances it is unclear whether a named person was single, married or had children. Therefore, further checks have been made using parish registers and censuses.¹¹ The average number of children in male-headed families has been estimated as four based on research for this study from the 1841 census (see previous chapter). It was found that in all but two of the sixteen parishes just under half of the families had more than three children; several

⁸ M. Crowther observed that approximately four fifths of all paupers had outdoor relief by the end of the eighteenth century; M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The history of an English social institution* (London: 1981).

⁹ S. King, 'Managing the Distance Dimensions of Poor Relief, 1800-40', *Rural History*, 16 (2005), 161-189.

¹⁰ Williams found that out-based parishioners comprised seventeen per cent of relief recipients in Campton and nineteen per cent in Shefford; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 83. French referred to fourteen families being relieved in 'outlying parishes' in Terling but he does not directly discuss out-parishioners; French, 'How dependent?' King has pointed out the limitations of overseers' accounts which varied greatly in the detail they included; S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s-1830s*, (London: 2019).

¹¹ There are a number of problems with using the parish registers to trace families: children may have been born prior to the family moving into the parish; parishioners sometimes shared the same name.

had four to six and a number in each parish had up to nine or ten.¹² Adult males are defined in this study as those aged sixteen and above and there is no upper age limit as there are many examples in the historiography of elderly men being expected to work without a recognised ‘retirement age’.¹³

Figure 4.1 Number of relief recipients named in the overseers’ accounts

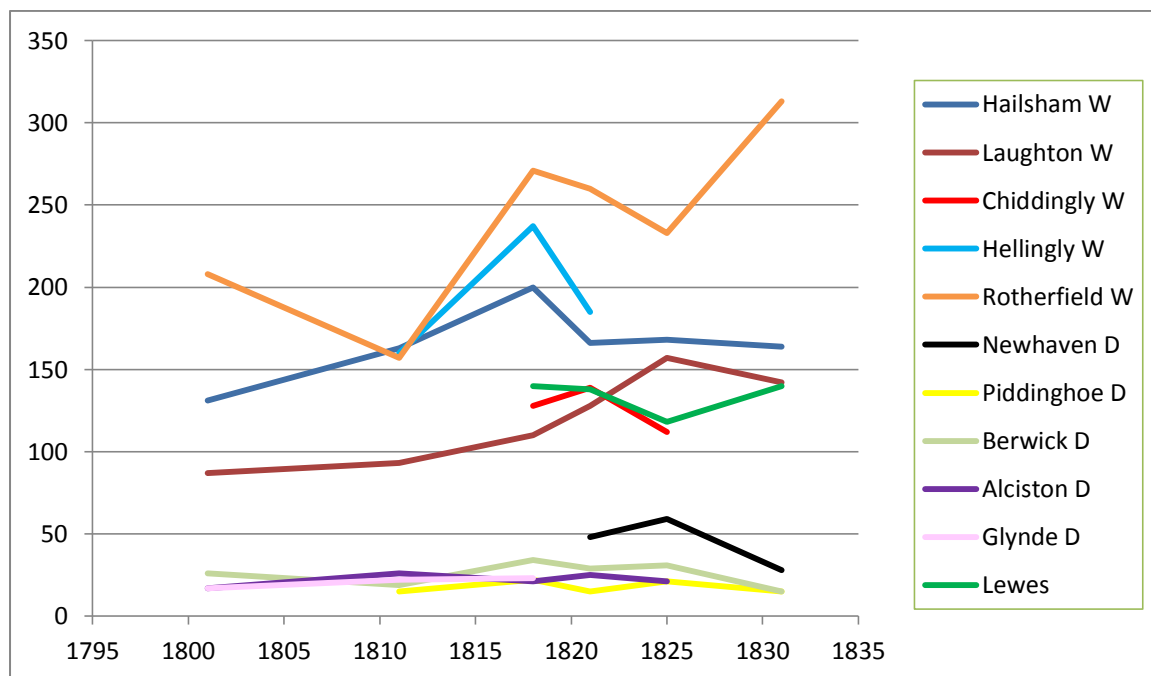


Figure 4.1 shows the total number of names on the relief lists between 1800 and 1832 in eleven of the study parishes.¹⁴ The results indicate consistently higher numbers in the Weald than on the Downs. The contrast appears stark with over 270 names in the wealden parish of Rotherfield by 1818 compared with approximately twenty in Piddinghoe by the Downs at the

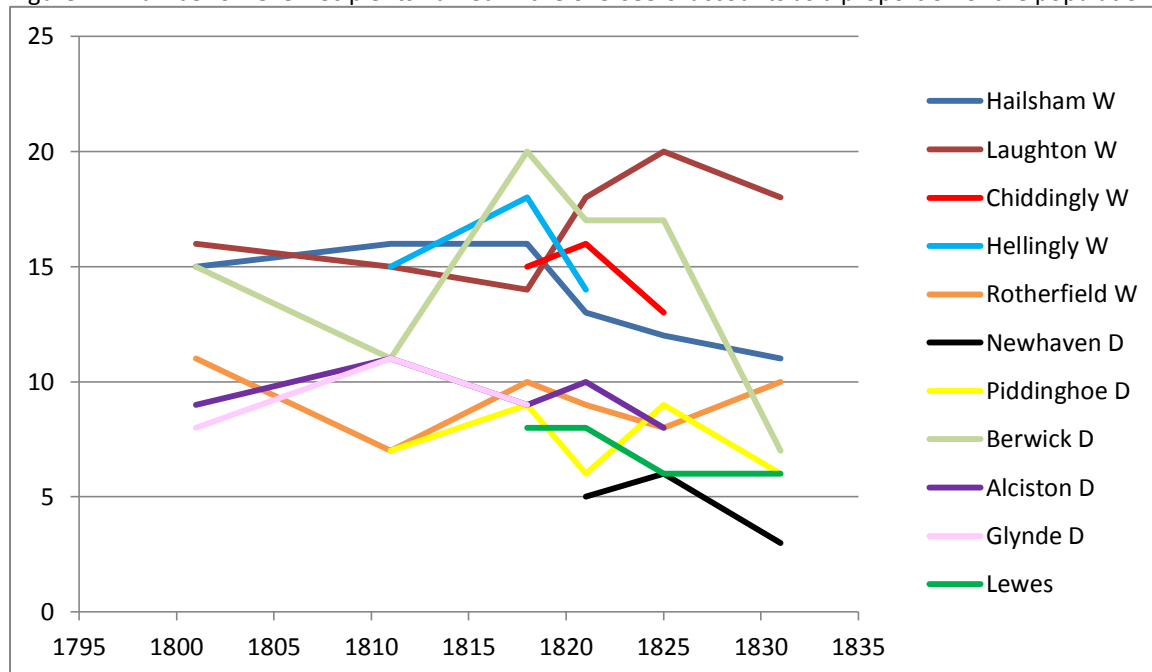
¹² Varying definitions of an average family size are given in the historiography. Laslett described the mean household size as 4.75 during this period: P. Laslett, ‘Mean Household Size in England since the Sixteenth Century’, in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: 1972), 125-58. Reay found that agricultural labourers’ mean number of children was 7.6 between 1800 and 1834 although they may not have all been co-residing, B. Reay, *Microhistories: demography, society and culture in rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge: 1996).

¹³ The 1832 government survey into poor relief referred to children as sixteen and under: *Report of His Majesty’s commissioners, 1834*. However, Williams defined dependent children as those aged fourteen and under: Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 27, 42. R. Smith referred to elderly men receiving support from the parish while they continued to work: R. Smith, ‘Ageing and well-being in early modern England’, in P. Johnson and P. Thane (eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London: 1998), 78.

¹⁴ Data for six years are included in the figures and tables to assess relief numbers: four census years between 1800 and 1832 so that the proportion of the population can be calculated, and the years 1818/19 and 1825/6 as these represented periods of high unemployment following the French Wars and economic depression, notably in rural areas in the 1820s. The 1821 census has been used to estimate the proportion of the population in 1818/19. For the year 1825/26 a midway point between the 1821 and 1831 censuses has been used to estimate the proportion of the population.

same time. Of the seven parishes that have records for most of the period, there is a notable rise in relief numbers in Rotherfield, Hailsham, Laughton and Hellingly in the Weald compared with more even figures for Berwick, Alciston and Piddinghoe on or near the Downs. However, the population of the parishes also increased between 1800 and 1832 and when relief recipients are considered as a percentage of the population in Figure 4.2 below there are some variations in the results.

Figure 4.2 Number of relief recipients named in the overseers' accounts as a proportion of the population¹⁵



The wealden parishes continue to have the highest proportion of relief recipients and this is important because they generally had larger populations than the downland parishes so that considering numbers alone could give a misleading picture.¹⁶ Berwick, Lewes and Rotherfield show a different profile in the second figure. The former has a higher proportion of relief recipients than other downland parishes. The town of Lewes drops down in the figure with comparatively fewer people receiving support. In Rotherfield relief numbers were high throughout the period but the relatively large population means that the numbers appear lower in Figure 4.2. The results for Berwick need to be treated with some caution as the parish

¹⁵ Data in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 is taken from the overseers' accounts for each parish listed in the bibliography. It is not possible to establish whether every male pauper had a family but by using a combination of records it has been possible to do so with the majority and therefore the numbers in the figure are a close approximation.

¹⁶ The population of the wealden parishes in this study ranged from 510 to 2770 in 1821 while the population of the downland parishes ranged from 172 to 772 with a slightly higher population of 927 in Newhaven. The population of St John Sub Castro in Lewes was 1795.

had a very small population and a difference of two or three people would make a considerable change to the total percentage. Yet, as the discussion progresses, it will be apparent that Berwick's welfare system appears to be more similar to the wealden rather than the downland parishes. This is a reminder that disparities within regions also need to be taken into account.

However, the change in the Lewes profile is significant. Lewes, together with the port of Newhaven, is shown to have had the lowest proportion of parishioners in receipt of relief in Figure 4.2. This could well be because relatively few people were employed in agriculture in these parishes, (see previous chapter). The various sources used for this assessment of relief numbers - the overseers' accounts, censuses and parish registers - often refer to an individual's occupation. In the smaller agricultural parishes the majority of male relief recipients were agricultural labourers.¹⁷ This was also the case in Hailsham, although there were also several shoemakers, a bricklayer, collar maker, thatcher, wheelwright and a 'traveller'. Most of the men in the relief accounts in Newhaven were described as labourers and there were a few tradesmen including a carpenter and tailor. In the Lewes records several men were described as labourers and this could have included agricultural labourers, it is not always clear. Yet, a further twenty-two occupations have been identified in the relief accounts.¹⁸ Lewes paupers were thus engaged in a wider range of work but generally only one or two men in each occupation requested relief compared with the high number of men employed in agriculture across the parishes. These findings certainly support the proposition that agricultural labourers who were faced with issues of seasonal, temporary employment were more likely to seek support. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 both show that parishes with predominantly agricultural economies had higher numbers of relief recipients.¹⁹

¹⁷ Although even in the smallest parishes there were exceptions: in Berwick a sadler received relief and in Laughton a potter.

¹⁸ The varied occupations of relief recipients in Lewes included: one bargeman, two blacksmiths, a brewer's servant, one Bricklayer, five builders, one butcher, three carpenters, one sawyer, two coachsmiths, one coal heaver, two cordwainers, one ropemaker, two gardeners, one huckster, one painter, one papermaker, one plasterer, seven servants/in-service, six shoemakers, one bootmender, five tailors, and one tanner.

¹⁹ Baugh also noted the high levels of relief in agricultural communities in his assessment of increasing relief costs during the final decades of the Old Poor Law as they were directly impacted by poor harvests: Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief'. However, Baugh did not make allowances for inflation when considering relief costs; Feinstein's tables will be used in this study to adjust for inflation. Boyer pointed to two fundamental changes in rural economies in the late-eighteenth century: a prolonged increase in wheat prices and the decline of cottage industry, which led to increased dependency on poor relief: G. Boyer, *An Economic History of the New Poor Law, 1750-1850* (New York: 1990), 31.

In addition to considering the number of people in receipt of poor relief during the final decades of the OPL, it is also important to question their profile. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, pressure on welfare systems by the early-1800s, notably in parts of the southeast, occurred as more agricultural labourers and their dependents were given relief and it is therefore important to establish whether families were supported in the Sussex parishes. Table 4.2 below shows how many people were named on the relief lists and the relative number of males with and without dependents. In Hailsham approximately half of the names in the overseers' lists belonged to men with dependents by 1810/11 and in Laughton and Berwick this was the case by 1821/22. In Chiddingly, Hellingly and Piddinghoe the ratio was lower with male-headed families representing approximately one third of recipients while in Lewes the ratio was approximately one quarter. The picture for Newhaven is less clear as there was an apparent drop in the number of relief recipients and in particular families by 1831, which will be discussed below.

Table 4.2 Number of names in the overseers' accounts and number of those names who were men with dependents

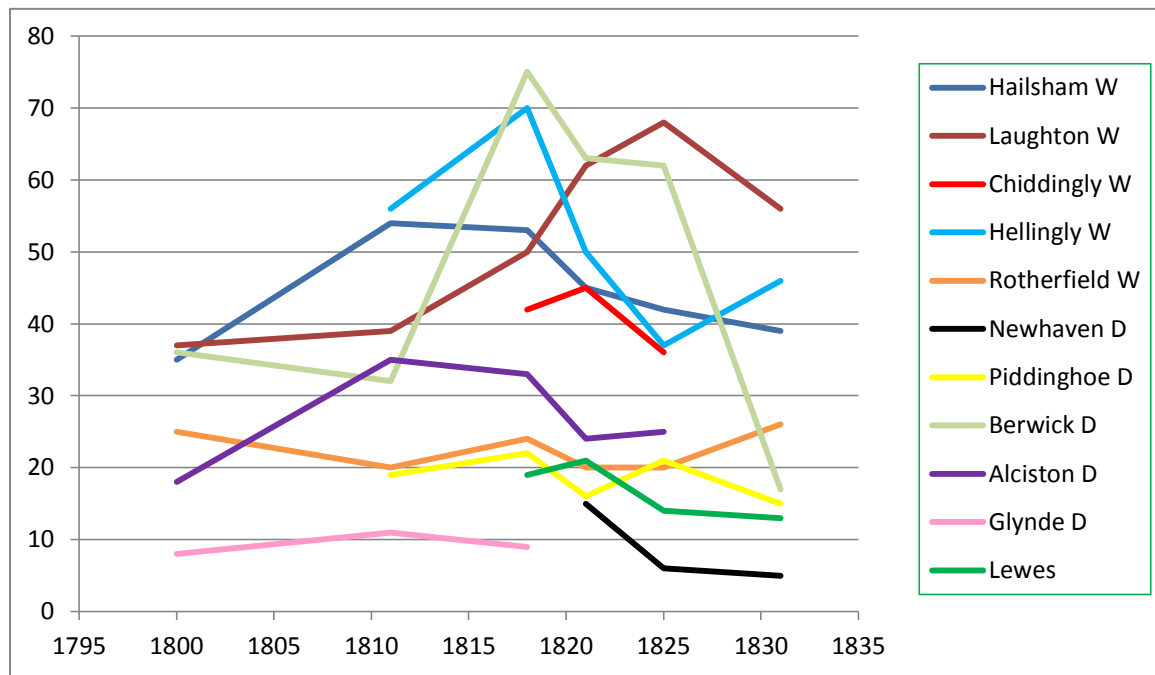
Parish		1800/01	1810/11	1818/19	1821/22	1825/26	1831/32
Hailsham W	Names	131	163	200	166	168	164
	Families	35	77	94	79	72	77
Laughton W	Names	87	93	-	108	157	142
	Families	21	27	-	63	71	60
Chiddingly W	Names	-	-	128	139	112	-
	Families	-	-	45	48	39	-
Hellingly W	Names	-	160	237	185	163	214
	Families	-	66	75	73	63	85
Rotherfield W	Names	208	157	271	-	233	313
	Families	78	72	107	-	95	128
Newhaven D	Names	-	-	-	48	59	28
	Families	-	-	-	18	19	2
Berwick D	Names	26	19	34	29	31	15
	Families	5	5	17	14	15	5
Alciston D	Names	17	26	21	25	21	-
	Families	5	12	11	8	7	-
Piddinghoe D	Names	-	15	22	15	21	15
	Families	-	5	6	5	4	4
Glynde D	Names	17	22	23	-	-	-
	Families	4	6	10	-	-	-
Lewes	Names	-	-	140	138	118	140
	Families	-	-	39	45	34	34

The results in Table 4.2 suggest that policies regarding the support of male-headed families may have varied within the parishes. French has made a similar point; he noted that both his study of Terling and Sokoll's study of Ardleigh in Essex identified an increase in support to families during the final years of the OPL in contrast to the parishes of Shefford and Campton in Williams' study. All three studies referred to individual welfare cultures which develop from negotiations between ratepayers and relief recipients. The sentiments of parish ratepayers towards supporting male-headed families will be explored further in section 4.3 below.²⁰

When dependents are included within relief numbers, the totals change dramatically and in some parishes a high percentage of parishioners would have come into contact with the relief system. Figure 4.3 below presents the proportion of each parish population given support when family members are taken into account. The dependents in this figure include children of widows; however, these only accounted for a few, the majority were members of male-headed families. The general profile of higher numbers in the Weald and Berwick, a mid-way position for the downland parish of Alciston and far lower numbers in Piddinghoe, Glynde, Lewes and Newhaven still holds true. Over sixty per cent of parishioners were supported in Hellingly, Laughton and Berwick between the years 1816 and 1826. In contrast, in the Lewes parish the proportion only reached twenty per cent and in Newhaven sixteen per cent. There are some anomalies in the results which are hard to explain. In the wealden parish of Rotherfield the proportion of the parish population in receipt of relief is below thirty per cent. Over half of the adult males in this parish were employed as agricultural labourers and there are high numbers on the relief lists. However, as noted above, the population of Rotherfield was relatively large and paupers do not represent such a high proportion of parishioners compared with some of the other wealden parishes.

²⁰ French, Williams and Sokoll referred to the difference in welfare regimes in individual parishes: French, 'How dependent?'; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*; T. Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices and the Allowance Cycle: Poverty and Poor Relief in the Agricultural Community of Ardleigh 1794-1801', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: 2015).

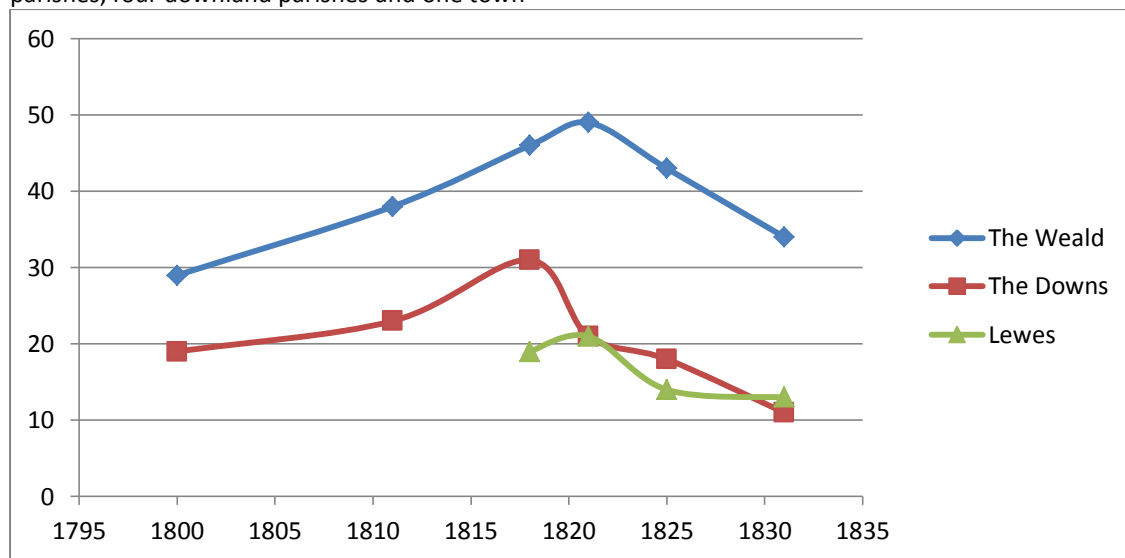
Figure 4.3 Proportion of each parish population in receipt of relief including dependents



To further explore the intra-regional differences in poverty levels between the Weald, the Downs and the town of Lewes, relief numbers, including dependents, and parish populations from four wealden parishes have been combined to give a total percentage of people given support in six sample years between 1800 and 1831. The same method has been applied to four downland parishes.²¹ The totals are compared with data for the Lewes parish. The results are presented in Figure 4.4 below and demonstrate a very clear intra-regional difference in relief numbers throughout the period. Contemporary references to the high levels of poverty in the Weald, discussed in Chapter One, are borne out by these figures. Similar contemporary references to minimal levels of poverty in downland parishes are also apparent in the figures (although there are exceptions such as Berwick which have already been noted). Figure 4.4 demonstrates clearly the closer alignment between relief levels in Lewes and the downland parishes rather than Lewes and the wealden parishes. There were peaks in relief numbers at slightly different times; 1818 on the Downs and 1821 in the Weald. A more detailed analysis of changes in the size of the relief lists over time is given further on in this section.

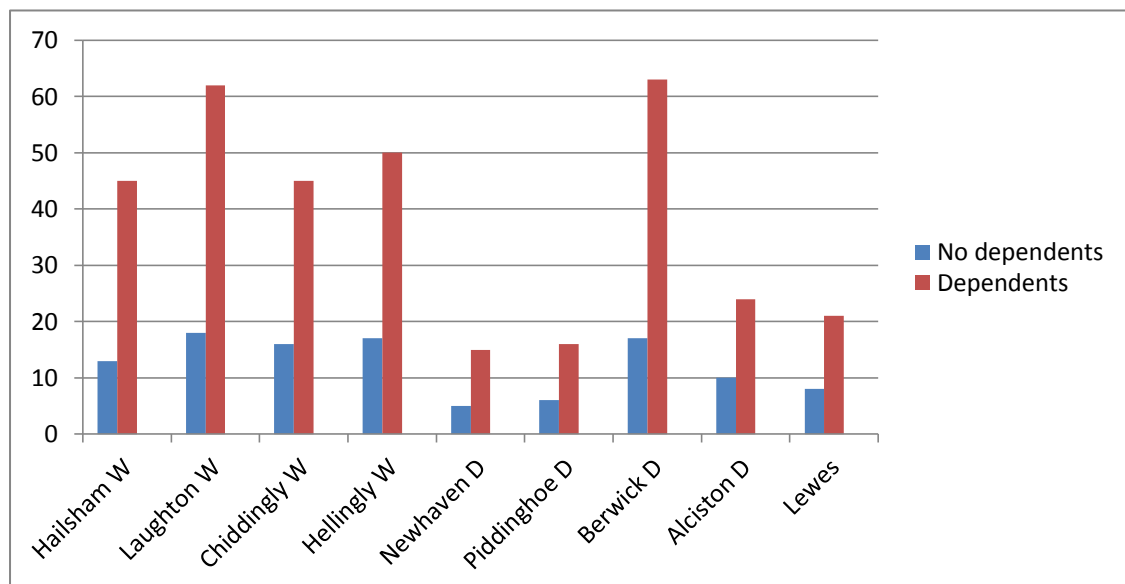
²¹ Only three parishes for the Weald and the Downs can be included for 1800: Hailsham, Laughton and Rotherfield for the Weald and Berwick, Alciston and Glynde for the Downs. For the other years the wealden parishes are: Hailsham, Laughton and Hellingly with data from Rotherfield for (1811) and Chiddingly (1818, 1821, 1825 and 1831). The downland parishes are Piddinghoe, Berwick, Alciston with data from Glynde (1811, 1818) and Newhaven (1821, 1825, 1831).

Figure 4.4 Proportion of parish populations in receipt of relief including dependents based on four wealden parishes, four downland parishes and one town



The importance of taking dependents into account when discussing the numbers of relief recipients is further demonstrated in Figure 4.5 below. Data is taken from the year 1821 during the post-war agricultural depression when relief numbers were particularly high.²² Comparison is made between the number of relief recipients, with and without dependents, as a proportion of each parish population. In addition to the contrast in the numbers when family members are included, this figure further illustrates the difference in parish populations in receipt of relief with the very high numbers for the Weald and Berwick.

Figure 4.5 Proportion of the population in receipt of relief, with and without dependents, in 1821.



²² Boyer referred to the period between 1815 and 1824 as a post-war agricultural depression when relief expenditure increased in response to high unemployment: Boyer, *An Economic History*, 80.

Samantha Williams has also calculated the total number of named relief recipients, and all paupers and their dependents, as a proportion of the population in Campton and Shefford. Her chosen parishes were small with populations of 410 in rural Campton and 618 in the market town of Shefford in 1821. The Bedfordshire town of Shefford had a higher proportion of agricultural labourers than the Sussex town of Lewes: twenty-two per cent in Shefford compared with nine per cent in Lewes. Therefore, while there were clear distinctions between Williams' sample parishes, their economies were probably not as diverse as those of the rural parishes and Lewes in Sussex. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Two, cottage industries such as straw-plaiting in both Bedfordshire parishes meant that employment in addition to agriculture was available, notably for women and girls.

Williams found that there was a significant difference in total relief numbers between Campton and Shefford in 1801 when demands on the relief systems were at a peak due to poor harvests and high wheat prices. Forty six-per cent of the population received support in Campton compared with seventeen per cent in Shefford. However, 1801 proved an exception and in the following years the total proportion of named relief recipients and of recipients with dependents was reasonably similar in Williams' rural Bedfordshire parish compared with her town parish. In Sussex poverty levels were also fairly similar between rural downland parishes and the town of Lewes but not between the wealden parishes and Lewes where there was much greater disparity. Williams' study also noted that fewer families were supported in the town of Shefford than in rural Campton just as fewer families have been noted for the town of Lewes in Sussex.²³

A further study which offers useful comparisons with eastern Sussex is John Langton's work in Oxfordshire. He has assessed the proportion of parishioners in receipt of relief in thirteen Oxfordshire parishes based on data from government surveys in 1803, 1818 and 1832.²⁴ Langton questioned whether the nature of poor relief varied across 'intra-regionally nuanced' farming systems and geographical areas within the county by looking at parishes in the Chilterns, the Cotswolds and the Central Vales which, like the Sussex Weald and the South Downs, had differing farming conditions and farm sizes. He identified variations in the

²³ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*.

²⁴ Data from government surveys is available for the Sussex parishes but has not been included in this section on the number of people in receipt of relief as the figures vary from those in the local accounts. See Chapter Three for a discussion of the discrepancies between local and government records.

proportion of relief recipients within the geographically diverse areas with higher numbers in the predominantly grain growing Chilterns than in the pastureland of the Vales.²⁵ It is worth noting that the differences between the percentages of the parish populations receiving relief in Langton's study were similar to the differences in the Sussex study. In Oxfordshire in 1803 the proportions of the populations range from twelve to thirty-eight if the two parishes which clearly misreported are omitted. In eastern Sussex the proportions in Figure 4.3 above range from eight to thirty-seven. This would suggest that the intra-regional differences in the number of people receiving relief in eastern Sussex were not dissimilar to at least one other rural county, Oxfordshire. However, Langton's study appears to vary from this one as the parishes with high relief numbers in the Chilterns tended to have large scale farms employing many labourers albeit on a temporary basis. In Sussex the large farms were on the Downs and appeared to offer more permanent employment than the smaller wealden farms.

So far in this discussion of the profile of relief recipients, particular attention has been given to male-headed families. Yet men without dependents, single men and those who were married with no children, also need to be taken into account. Table 4.3 below shows the percentage of relief recipients who were males without children, those with children and all adult males as a percentage of relief recipients for the four census years between 1801 and 1831.²⁶ When considering the broader profile of men, a similar picture emerges between this analysis and other studies. French noted that working-age men rarely appeared on relief lists before 1795 but after that time they became intermittent recipients while King's study of parishes in the south and east found that the proportion of male relief recipients increased over the period 1760-1820; by 1820 the figure was in the region of sixty per cent. The percentage of male relief recipients was also approximately sixty per cent by 1820 in the Sussex parishes.²⁷ This is the one area in which all Sussex parishes have very similar results. Where they differ in terms of male paupers is that proportionately more had families in the wealden parishes and Berwick and Alciston. Also, in Newhaven the high percentage of men in 1821 was not sustained by 1831 when the majority of relief recipients were children and women.

²⁵ J. Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire' in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement*, 193-234.

²⁶ All males over 16 have been included as it was noted above that elderly men were often expected to work.

²⁷ French, 'How dependent?', 216; King, *Poverty and welfare*, 165.

Table 4.3 Proportion of relief recipients who were males with and without dependents.

Parish	1800/01			1810/11			1821/22			1831/32		
	Males Single or married with no children	Male-headed families	Total males	Males Single or married with no children	Male-headed families	Total males	Males Single or married with no children	Male-headed families	Total males	Males Single or married with no children	Male-headed families	Total males
Hailsham W	15%	27%	42%	16%	47%	63%	17%	48%	65%	7%	47%	55%
Laughton W	9%	24%	33%	18%	29%	37%	20%	49%	69%	19%	42%	61%
Chiddingly W	-	-	-	-	-	-	17%	35%	52%	-	-	-
Hellingly W				12%	41%	53%	20%	43%	63%	39%	36%	75%
Rotherfield W	22%	37%	59%	17%	46%	63%	-	-	-	17%	36%	53%
Newhaven D	-	-		-	-	-	21%	38%	59%	21%	7%	28%
Piddinghoe D	-			26%	33%	59%	27%	27%	54%	20%	26%	46%
Berwick D	15%	19%	34%	16%	26%	42%	17%	48%	65%	33%	33%	66%
Alciston D	11%	29%	40%	8%	46%	54%	20%	36%	56%	-	-	-
Glynde D	24%	24%	48%	18%	27%	45%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lewes	-	-	-	-	-	-	35%	33%	68%	29%	24%	53%

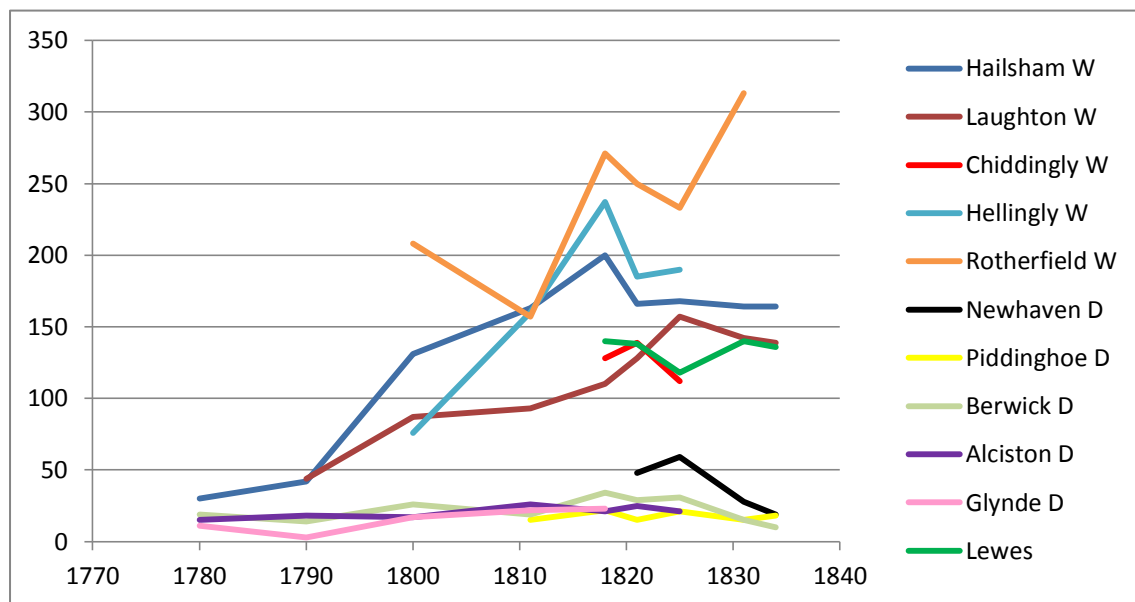
In Lewes, Piddinghoe and Glynde the number of males with and without dependents was much closer than in the other parishes. Overall pauper numbers are very low in the Piddinghoe and Glynde overseers' accounts and therefore comparisons in the profile of the poor are not very informative. However, the results for Lewes are more difficult to explain. Records from the 1821 and 1841 censuses for the parishes in the study indicate that approximately half of the men in each parish had families and half were single or in a couple without children living at home. This applied to the town of Lewes as well as the agricultural parishes. One possible explanation for relatively higher numbers of male paupers without dependents in Lewes might be that single men were more likely to move from a rural parish to a town if they were struggling to support themselves. June Sheppard carried out research into out-migration from 1821 to 1851 in Chiddingly and found that 224 single men migrated compared with forty-four families.²⁸ Richard Dyson's study of the parish of St Giles in Oxford found that male-headed

²⁸ J. Sheppard, 'Out-migration 1821-1851 from a Wealden parish: Chiddingly', *Local Population Studies*, 59 (1997), 13-25.

families were a minority in the urban parish compared with many rural areas in the south and east.²⁹

In the two wealden parishes with data for all four census years in Table 4.3 the increase in male-headed families on the relief lists occurs at different times, between 1801 and 1811 in Hailsham, and 1811 and 1821 in Laughton. Within the historiography there is evidence that increases in the number of relief recipients and a change in their profile to include more male-headed families, notably in grain growing agricultural regions, actually began during the late-eighteenth century.³⁰ To explore this further and pinpoint times when changes occurred in eastern Sussex, the number of paupers in the relief lists has been recorded across a broader time span. Figure 4.6 below includes relief figures for 1780 and 1790 for parishes with extant records covering that period. Data for the year 1834 has also been included where possible so that numbers can be assessed immediately before the implementation of the NPL which took place in the parishes in 1835. The number of names rather than the proportion of parishioners is shown in the table as census information is not available prior to 1801.

Figure 4.6 Number of named relief recipients in each parish between 1780 and 1834



²⁹ R. Dyson, 'Who were the poor of Oxford in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?', in A. Gestrich, S. King, L. Raphael (eds.), *Being Poor in Modern Europe* (Oxford: 2006).

³⁰ Dunkley referred to a definite change in the composition of relief recipients to include more young males in the 1790s: P. Dunkley, 'Paternalism, the magistracy and poor relief in England, 1795-1834', *International Review of Social History*, 24 (1979), 371-397. Stapleton has found that more people and younger people were receiving support from either the parish or charities by the late-eighteenth century, B. Stapleton, 'Inherited Poverty and Life-Cycle Poverty: Odiham, Hampshire 1650-1850', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 339-55.

Figure 4.6 shows that there was a rise in relief numbers in four of the five parishes with records for the eighteenth century: Hailsham, Laughton, Berwick and Glynde, during the 1790s. The most dramatic change occurred in the wealden parishes. In Hailsham the number of relief recipients rose from forty-two in 1790 to 111 by 1800 and male-headed families increased from fewer than ten to thirty eight. A similar picture emerges for the wealden parish of Laughton where there was a doubling of people on the relief lists and also of male-headed families between 1790 and 1800. Numbers also doubled in Glynde between 1790 and 1800 but then plateaued at the 1801 level remaining consistent until 1818 when there was another small rise. In Berwick there was a further increase between 1810 and 1820. Data on paupers for Lewes is only available from 1817 in the overseers' accounts but expenditure on poor relief was recorded in the vestry minutes from 1800 and shows an increase from £407 to £1,287 during the first decade of the nineteenth century. While precise relief numbers cannot be ascertained directly from expenditure, such a steep rise is likely to indicate more people were receiving support. There was also a significant increase in the population of the Lewes parish from approximately 650 to 1,126 people between 1801 and 1811, a much bigger rise compared with the other study parishes. This may have accounted for some of the additional spending and is another example of certain parishes experiencing discrete circumstances which could affect changes in poor relief.³¹

Daniel Baugh has identified three stages during the final decades of the Old Poor Law when there was a change in the number and profile of relief recipients: the 1790s-1813; 1814-1820s and 1820-1834. He based his study on three counties in the southeast including Sussex. While Baugh focused on relief spending, he argued that more male-headed families were receiving support, often in the form of an income subsidy. The rise in parish spending began in stage one due mainly to high food prices; there was a steep increase in stage two partly due to unemployment following the war, and a plateauing of expenditure and relief numbers in stage three when rural unemployment rather than high food prices was the main problem.³²

Figure 4.6 shows that peaks in relief numbers occurred in some of the Sussex parishes during the stage two and three periods described by Baugh. In Hailsham, Hellingly and Berwick

³¹ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), Lewes vestry minutes, PAR412/12/1-2.

³² Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief'.

numbers were at their highest in 1818. There appears to have been a peak in Chiddingly in 1821 and in Laughton during 1825, years that witnessed economic depression in the countryside following poor harvests. The number of male-headed families on the relief lists increased in line with the rise in numbers in each of these parishes. When discussing the supply of relief later in this chapter, it will be seen that vestries adopted measures to deal with very high demand at slightly different times. However, it is important to stress that while peaks in relief numbers are apparent, growing pressure on welfare systems between the late-eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century in these Sussex parishes reflects a long-term trend.

While the relief numbers grew in the wealden parishes and in Berwick and to a lesser extent Glynde, in the other downland parishes of Alciston and Piddinghoe, the situation was more stable. In Piddinghoe there was very little alteration in the numbers between 1810 and 1834 and few families received relief. There was also little change between 1780 and 1800 in Alciston, the other parish with extant records for the late-eighteenth century. There was a slight rise in numbers between 1810 and 1820 at which point they levelled off. Just as there is a difference in the findings for some of the eastern Sussex parishes, there are also variations within the historiography. Susannah Ottaway has argued that the number of elderly people receiving parish relief remained high in the parish of Puddletown in Dorset at the end of the eighteenth century and there was less evidence of an increase in younger families compared with other studies. Mark Neuman has also found that only a few able-bodied males received support in sixteen Berkshire parishes between 1795 and 1834; possibly only three or four out of several hundred males in the parishes.³³

Another important change demonstrated in Figure 4.6 is the steep decline in relief numbers by 1834 in two of the parishes, Newhaven and Berwick. There was a reduction from fifty-nine to nineteen between 1825 and 1834 in Newhaven and from thirty-four to an estimate of ten between 1818 and 1834 in Berwick. While there is not an obvious explanation for this trend in the former parish, in the latter there was a dramatic change in the relief system after 1831. The overseers stopped recording individuals in their accounts in 1830 but the amount of money spent on outdoor relief was halved between 1831 and 1832 and reduced again between 1832

³³ S. Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 13, (1998), 391-318; M. Neuman, *The Speenhamland County: Poverty and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1781-1834* (London: 1982).

and 1834. Yet, total spending on disbursements showed little change; rather more money was spent on workhouse costs indicating a reduction in outdoor relief and an increase in indoor relief.³⁴ A decline in numbers just prior to the NPL in any of the parishes is a significant feature within this data. In many respects this would not have been a surprising trend. As Peter Jones has pointed out, between 1824 and 1832 many parishes tightened their relief systems and reduced certain support mechanisms such as child allowances and subsidisation of wages. If overseers were looking to reduce costs, that could affect the number of people granted relief. This will be explored in the following two sections of this chapter which consider the type of relief provided and the approach of officials towards the poor.³⁵

French noted an 'inexorable' rise in relief payments to male-headed households between the 1770s and 1834 in Terling. In 1801 fifty-four male-headed families were in receipt of relief, considerably more than in Laughton in Sussex which had a similar population, although numbers had reached and exceeded that level in Laughton by 1821. The findings for Terling were similar to those for the Weald. The high number of families in French's study suggests that the wealden parishes may not have been exceptional but that parts of rural Sussex and Essex exemplified the growing levels of relief provision in the southeast during the last decades of the OPL.³⁶ Comparison might well be made between Sussex and Essex parishes using King's models of welfare regimes. Terling and Laughton for example might both be described as predominantly Entitling Regimes with a supportive approach towards relief recipients from quite large vestries that maintained control over relief spending, even though much of Terling was owned by one family.³⁷

A further change in the relief lists that occurred over time in some of the wealden parishes was an increase in the regularity of payments with more names appearing on the weekly pay lists during the first decades of the nineteenth century, notably male-headed families. In the parish of Laughton there were forty-five such families on the weekly lists by 1825.³⁸ There was some

³⁴ ESRO, Berwick overseers' accounts, PAR239/30/1.

³⁵ P. Jones, 'Swing, Speenhamland and rural social relations: the "moral economy" of the English crowd in the nineteenth century', *Social History*, 32 (2007), 283.

³⁶ French, 'How dependent?'

³⁷ S. King, 'Welfare Regimes and Welfare Regions in Britain and Europe, c. 1750s to 1860s', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2022), 42-66.

³⁸ In Hailsham the number of names on the weekly lists went up from twenty in 1802 to forty four in 1825; in Laughton the number went from fifteen to sixty seven and in Chiddingly from twenty nine in 1818 to sixty in 1825.

increase in weekly pensions in the downland parishes of Berwick and Alciston but in Piddinghoe, Glynde and Lewes there was little change during this period. However, focusing on weekly payments as a means of providing more permanent support can be misleading as a number of people received regular relief in the form of rent payment and others, notably in the larger wealden parishes of Hailsham, Laughton and Hellingly, received a range of different support for many weeks in a year. In Hailsham there were between fifty and eighty of these regular relief recipients throughout the period 1800 to 1835 and the majority were male-headed families.

The situation in Laughton where many male-headed families were receiving weekly support may have been unusual. King and French found in their studies that able-bodied men were receiving relief more regularly by the early-nineteenth century but they rarely became dependent on the parish and in Williams' study most families on the relief lists were given temporary support in the rural parish of Campton.³⁹ One explanation for the difference between Sussex and Bedfordshire could be that the wider range of occupations for women and girls in Campton meant that in most years families could remain independent. Temporary support of families in the Bedfordshire parish occurred when there was a downturn in the market. As discussed in Chapter Three, there was limited opportunity for women and girls to work in the rural Sussex parishes other than as servants or in short-term farmwork. This highlights the importance of individual parish economies in determining relief levels and thus the propensity for enduring local differences in the scale and form of relief as Hindle has argued. However, as suggested above, some of the Sussex parishes shared characteristics of an 'Entitlement Regime' with Terling in Essex which also supports King's proposal that parish relief systems could reflect similar regimes. The Sussex evidence indicates that the views of Hindle and King are not incompatible.⁴⁰

As people were becoming more dependent on relief it is useful to consider in more detail the duration of that support. One way to do this is to look at the parishes with records that included the names of individuals for several consecutive years between 1800 and 1834 and

In Chiddingly the number of male-headed families on the weekly relief lists rose from nine in 1800 to twenty-three in 1825.

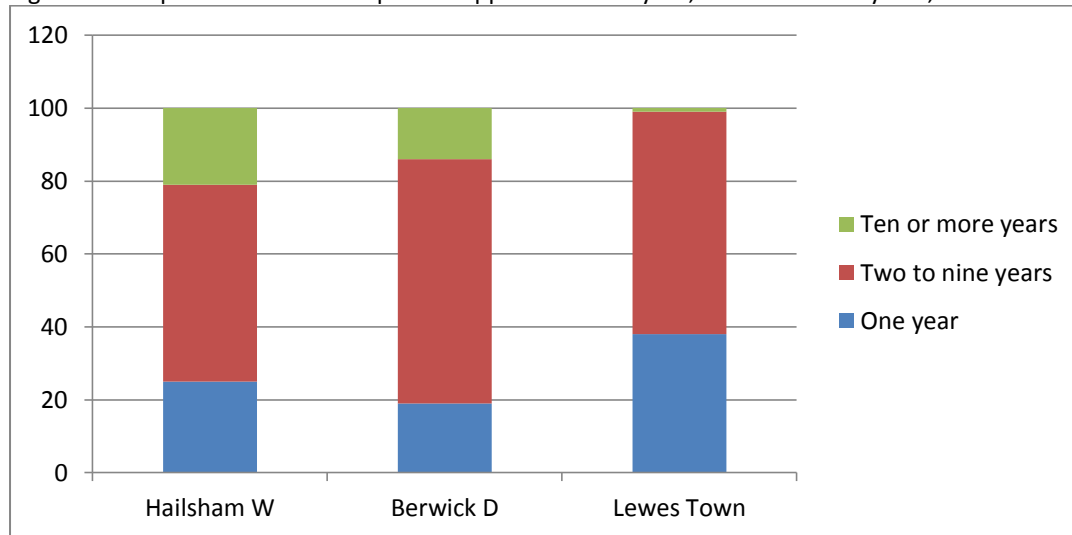
³⁹ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 176; French, 'How dependent?'; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*.

⁴⁰ Hindle, *On the Parish?*; King, 'Welfare Regimes'.

count the people who received relief in only one year and those who were supported for longer periods. There are many problems with attempting this exercise, some of which have already been discussed in the methodology section of Chapter Three. The same name might not represent the same person, particularly over an extended period. People on the weekly pay list who were clearly regular relief recipients were not always named and therefore may not appear in the records. Children whose board and lodging were paid for out of the poor rates appear to come and go on the relief lists and may not have always been included. Perhaps more significantly the demand for relief fluctuated across the period 1800-1834 and there would have been some years when more people might have required support for a short while. However, while it is clearly not possible to obtain entirely accurate figures of short or long-term relief recipients, it is possible to gain an estimate given that the total numbers across the period are considerable, well over one hundred in even the smallest parishes.

This approach has been implemented on the three parishes of Hailsham, Berwick and Lewes, representing the Weald, the Downs and a town and the results are displayed in Figure 4.7 below. Numbers have been counted from 1816, the start of extant relief records for Lewes up to 1828 when names were no longer included in the overseers' accounts for Berwick. People whose names only occur once in 1816 or 1828 have not been included as they may have received relief in years prior to, or following, those years. A count was made of paupers who were given relief in only one year and those who had support for ten or more years. A total of all people receiving relief between 1816 and 1828 was also calculated so that a figure for the proportion of short-and longer-term relief recipients could be obtained. The percentages in Figure 4.7 again indicate that there were more temporary relief recipients in the town. The results for Hailsham and Berwick are closer although a higher number of people received long-term relief in the wealden parish. In all three parishes the majority of people were supported for longer than one year suggesting that poor relief played an important part in the lives of many people during the difficult years between 1818 and 1828.

Figure 4.7 Proportion of relief recipients supported in one year, for two to nine years, and for more than ten years



Stapleton’s study of Odiham in Hampshire found that during the first half of the nineteenth century once people began to receive support, sixty-six per cent of them received it for the rest of their lives.⁴¹ However, his research included records from charitable bequests as well as parish relief. There are very few references to charities in the parishes for this study. The 1818 government assessment of the expense and maintenance of the poor included a question regarding the availability of charities. Only three of the study parishes, Newhaven, Rotherfield and Laughton, referred to annual bequests worth over £20; two were for schools.⁴² King has noted that charity was inequitably distributed in the south and east; parishes such as Whitchurch in Oxford were similar to the Sussex parishes in having little or no bequests. He estimates that by 1817 charitable income had declined overall dropping from forty five-per cent of poor law spending to twenty per cent.⁴³

Clearly, assessing the number of people in receipt of relief can only provide a partial picture of individual relief systems. In order to obtain a better understanding of the anomalies between parishes that have been identified in the discussion so far, it is essential to consider all aspects of relief. The next section will therefore explore the type of relief supplied to the poor in the study parishes with the aim of gaining some insight into their experiences. This section on relief

⁴¹ Stapleton and Robin have both identified an important role played by charities in supporting the poor in their studies: Stapleton, ‘Inherited Poverty’, 339-355; J. Robin, ‘The Relief of Poverty in Mid Nineteenth-Century Colyton’, *Rural History*, 1 (2009), 193-218.

⁴² *Abstract of answers and returns relative to expense and maintenance of the poor in England and Wales*, PP 1818 C.82, 17.

⁴³ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 173.

numbers has demonstrated that the geography and economy of parishes were important factors in determining whether high numbers of people required support. It is likely that they also played a role in deciding what type of relief officials could offer to the poor and it will be important to assess to what extent this might have varied intra-regionally and also how it compared with parishes in other regions.

4.2: The nature of poor relief

The nature of poor relief in the Sussex parishes is discussed in terms of the range of relief that was supplied by officials and also the experience of the poor who received that relief. This study aims to contribute to the longstanding debate within the historiography regarding whether the OPL can be regarded as generous or minimalist, and also whether it can be described as flexible.⁴⁴ Officials could arrange for people to receive payments in cash and in kind; provide support for children; offer employment and indoor relief in a poor house or workhouse. Each of these forms of relief is considered in the parishes and case studies are compiled of individual labourers and their families from the four sample parishes of Hailsham, Berwick, Lewes and Newhaven. There has been considerable focus in the historiography on particular forms of relief. Reference will be made to a number of these debates including the significance of clothing as a form of relief; the wider impact of the allowance system; and whether arranging apprenticeships and providing indoor relief led to the harsh treatment of paupers.

In the previous section intra-regional differences were noted in the number and profile of the poor. However, when considering the range of relief, intra-regional variations arguably become less apparent. King and Jones have drawn attention to the regular correspondence between officials in parishes often situated in separate counties and Samantha Shave has discussed the importance of 'knowledge networks' and shared policies amongst parishes. It is also evident from local diaries and letters that overseers regularly met with neighbours, notably in farming

⁴⁴ King presented a comprehensive analysis of this 'Welfare Debate' covering both the Old and New Poor Laws in *Poverty and welfare*, 48-76. He identified three perspectives: an optimistic view that the OPL was pragmatic and provided relatively generous pensions; a more neutral stance which regards the poor law as a safety net when all else failed and a pessimistic view reflecting a negative sentiment towards the poor on the part of officials who aimed to suppress relief spending.

communities, where they would gather at local markets.⁴⁵ Furthermore, there is evidence that the Justices of the Peace in Sussex had an influence on the range of relief provided by the overseers under the OPL.⁴⁶ It is therefore not surprising that the support offered appears to have conformed to certain standards and values, certainly between close-lying parishes. However, some distinctions can be identified, often as a result of differing economic circumstances and also population size. Changes over time in the form of the relief provided can be detected, notably when there was an increased pressure on the system. These distinctions are analysed below by comparing the range of support offered in the Sussex parishes across the period 1800 to 1834.

As discussed above, relief in the form of cash could be paid as a regular pension and also on a casual basis. All of the Sussex parishes provided regular and less formal cash payments to the poor throughout the period. It is clear from the overseers' records that the value of more regular pensions was very similar between the parishes and across time. There appears to have been a standard payment of between 1s. and 3s. a week to single people such as widows and the elderly, and from 4s. to 10s. for families with children, including single parents and couples with children. Additional amounts were given to regular pensioners and also to individuals in need, often due to illness or to a wife 'lying-in', and these ranged from 2s. to 10s. The pensions in the Sussex records are similar to findings from other parishes in the southeast during the first decades of the nineteenth century and suggest that officials were aware of a 'standard' amount to give the poor. King has noted two different payment strategies in this region during the early-nineteenth century: in some places pensions grew in number and amount while in other areas they grew in number but the amount stagnated. It was clear in the previous section that in most, but not all, of the Sussex parishes pensions increased in number. However, their

⁴⁵ P. Jones and S. King, 'From Petition to Pauper Letter: The Development of an Epistolary Form', in *Obligation, Entitlement*, 53-77; S. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester: 2017); Rev. E. Ellman, *Recollections of a Sussex Parson* (Derbyshire: 2004).

⁴⁶ In 1801 when wheat prices had escalated the JPs in Sussex called the overseers and churchwardens to attend the quarter sessions so that they could check and approve measures put in place to substitute wheaten flour when providing for the poor: ESRO, Sussex bread Act Book, 1801, Q/2/V/1/1. Both P. King and S. King suggested that the influence of magistrates on relief policy was strongest in the southeast where there were instances of growing antagonism between vestries wishing to curb relief expenditure and the magistrates who could override the overseers: P. King, 'The Rights of the Poor and the Role of the Law: The impact of pauper Appeals to the Summary Courts 1750-1832', in *Obligation, Entitlement*; S. King, *Poverty and welfare*.

value remained similar during the final decades of the OPL thus conforming to King's second category.⁴⁷

In the Sussex parishes and also parishes in other south-eastern counties such as Terling in Essex, there was an increase in the number of people receiving payments by the early-nineteenth century. French assessed how relief compared with weekly earnings in Terling in the early 1800s. He cited male able-bodied labourers who received parish support which equated to between twenty five and fifty per cent of their total weekly income. These were generally payments of a temporary nature during times of unemployment or exceptionally high food prices.⁴⁸ Officials in Newhaven, Sussex, reported to the Poor Law Commissioners that the average wage to married men ranged from 10s. to 13s. and to a single man from 6s. to 9s. in 1835.⁴⁹ Similar figures were quoted from other Sussex parishes in responses to the 1832 enquiries.⁵⁰ Therefore, a male-headed family given 7s. in relief might have received the equivalent of over fifty per cent of a labourer's wage. A more regular pension of 2s. 6d. or 3s. to a single or elderly person would have equated to approximately thirty per cent of a single person's wage; these figures are similar to those of French. This would not have been sufficient to subsist on and it is widely acknowledged in the historiography that poor relief rarely met subsistence levels.⁵¹ However, in many cases cash payments were not the only form of support offered to parishioners. King has argued that the poor law in the southeast provided an ever-increasing range of goods and services by the early-nineteenth century.⁵²

Several types of payment in kind occur in the Sussex parish records and these are shown in Table 4.4. below.⁵³ Providing clothes was common practice, particularly for children either living at home or when being placed in-service. Contemporary social surveys indicate that clothing was the single largest category of expenditure after weekly subsistence for labouring families by the end of the eighteenth century. There is some debate in the historiography

⁴⁷ King discussed pension payments in fourteen rural southern and eastern parishes where the mean weekly pension for individuals was 2s. 4d. during the early-nineteenth century: King, *Poverty and welfare*, 150-154.

⁴⁸ French, 'How dependent?', 214.

⁴⁹ ESRO, Newhaven union letter book, G/7/8/1.

⁵⁰ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834.

⁵¹ A. Tomkins and S. King, 'Introduction to The Poor in England', in A. Tomkins and S. King, (eds.), *The poor in England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester: 2003), 9.

⁵² King, *Poverty and welfare*, 156.

⁵³ All of the parishes have been included in the table except Rodmell and Rottingdean as the few Old Poor Law records available for these parishes only refer to cash payments. Information in the table is taken from the overseers' accounts listed in the bibliography.

regarding the standard of outfits provided by the parish. Steven King has challenged Beverley Lemire's suggestion that the poor were only given clothes of a minimum standard to discourage dependence. He argues that some female paupers were given garments compatible with those of a working woman. Pauper letters suggest a shared recognition amongst the poor and officials that clothing was an essential requirement representing 'decency' and could be regarded as a continuation of a 'gift' relationship which formed part of the 'moral economy'. Jones agrees with King that providing clothes was seen as a fundamental role of the parish. However, he has queried King's view that pauper women might have received fairly fashionable items. While parish officials may on occasion have wished to prepare girls going into service with up to date outfits, most poor women received basic hard wearing, practical garments.⁵⁴

Table 4.4 Payment in kind in the study parishes

Parish	Clothes	Fuel	Flour /grain	Medical	Rent	Funeral	Hog fattening	Tools	Loans
Hailsham W	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Carpentry	Cow , Horse House
Laughton W	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		Cow, House
Chiddingly W	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Hellingly W	x Linsey	x	x	x	x	x	Keep of a cow		
Uckfield W	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Rotherfield W	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Scythe	
East Hoathly W	x	x		x	x	x			
Waldron W	x Bedding	x	x	x	x	x	x	Scythe	Furniture
Newhaven D	x	x	x	x	x	x			Boat Furniture
Piddinghoe D	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Alciston D	x	x	x	x	x				Cow Bedding
Berwick D	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Glynde D	x	x	x	x	x				
Lewes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Leather - making	Horse and cart

⁵⁴ S. King, 'Reclothing the English Poor, 1750-1840', *Textile History*, 33 (2002); B. Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford: 1991); P. Jones, 'Clothing the Poor in Early-Nineteenth Century England', *Textile History*, 37 (2006); P. Jones, "'I cannot keep my place without being deascent'": Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830', *Rural History*, 21 (2009), 34,35.

Fuel was regularly given, notably to the elderly, in the form of faggots, wood, coal and 'hoath' or furze. Flour, grist (corn), barley, oats and peas all appear in most of the parish accounts either as direct payments or as part of the overseers' bills. Some foods such as oats and hay were also provided for fattening the family hog and salt for salting the hog which was a provision common in parishes across Sussex.⁵⁵ Several households had their rent paid, this was usually four or five pounds a year and the parishes owned houses which were provided at a low or possibly no rental payment.⁵⁶ John Broad noted that by the eighteenth century it was common for parishes to pay rent for the poor. However, there is evidence in one of the Sussex parishes, Newhaven, that this form of relief was withdrawn in the early-1820s when the parish wished to tighten up on relief provision.⁵⁷ In Waldron the parish accounts record providing a dwelling for John Dulacke at a rental of £4 10s. a year together with a list of the contents including bedding, basic furniture and cooking utensils. Records from other parishes also refer to providing similar basic household items.⁵⁸

Care from a doctor or nurse was often funded by the parish; nursing was sometimes provided by other relief recipients including family members. King has found that medical support became an increasingly important component of welfare provision during the final decades of the OPL.⁵⁹ Funeral costs could also be paid from the poor rates. Elizabeth Hurren and King argue that many poor law officials recognised the rights of the dependent poor to have a decent funeral and did not stint on funding for pauper funerals. There are examples in the Sussex parishes of overseers spending one or two pounds on funeral costs. This provides

⁵⁵ ESRO, *Sussex Bread Act Book*.

⁵⁶ The 1601 Poor Law Act permitted parish officials to erect houses for the poor out of the poor rates. Many parishes across England had five to ten parish houses. These were usually sold off to help fund workhouses under the NPL. The parish would often pay the rent of poor people living in private rented housing. It was also common for several poor families to share houses: J. Broad, 'Housing the Rural Poor in Southern England', *Agricultural History Review*, 48 (2000), 151-170. In Chiddingly there are examples of houses being subdivided into accommodation for three families: J. Sheppard, 'Housing the agricultural worker in nineteenth-century Sussex', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 131.

⁵⁷ Broad, 'Housing the Rural Poor'. In Newhaven in September 1821 the assistant overseer stipulated that, 'No rents shall be paid out of the parish funds after Lady Day next. All landlords to be served notice': ESRO, Newhaven Select Vestry minutes, 1821, P426/1/3.

⁵⁸ ESRO, Waldron vestry minutes, 1783-1828, PAR499/12/1.

⁵⁹ S. King, *Sickness, medical welfare and the English Poor, 1750-1834* (Manchester: 2018). King has identified an escalation in relief spending on medical support between 1810 and the start of the NPL when at least twenty nine per cent of all relief spending was on sickness. There may have been a number of reasons: advances in medical knowledge; a resurgence of certain epidemics including smallpox, cholera, measles; an increase in infant mortality and less resistance to illness amongst poor families.

further support for the notion that despite spiralling relief costs parishes wished to treat the poor with dignity.⁶⁰

It is apparent from Table 4.4 that the Sussex parishes supplied a similar range of relief in kind although some provided certain items more frequently. The smaller downland parishes tended to give clothing and fuel on a very regular basis possibly because the overseers knew each parishioner.⁶¹ This wide range of relief provision including both cash and kind meant that officials could be flexible in their support. For many elderly pensioners the relatively small sum of 2s. or 3s. a week might only need to be spent on food as they often also had their rent paid and clothes, fuel and nursing supplied. The support given to Dame Proger in the downland parish of Alciston illustrates this: in 1817 she received a weekly pension of 3s., clothes worth 12s., wood and fuel worth £1 10s. and payment of her rent. This support might be described as generous.⁶² It also suggests that for a few people poor relief may have been sufficient for subsistence.⁶³

The provision of flour to the poor often seems to reflect changes in demand faced by officials and was a means by which they could be flexible in their support to parishioners. Bread was an essential part of the diet of poor families and when the price of wheat rose, several Sussex parishes provided additional flour. One way to track the supply of flour is to consider the regular bills paid to mill owners which are recorded in the parish accounts. These bills often increased when food prices were high and could affect the total cost of relief spending in a year. In Laughton the overseers' accounts refer to paying £26 19s. 4d. to cover extra flour for poor families in the year 1800/01 when food prices were particularly high. This payment is in addition to the regular flour bills in the accounts. In the same year in Alciston the flour bills

⁶⁰ Hurren and King used evidence from pauper letters to argue that contrary to much historiography which suggests pauper funerals were something to be feared and loathed, there are examples of generous support from relief officials including the provision of coffins, fitments, bells, entertainment for mourners and headstones: E. Hurren and S. King, 'Begging for a burial: form, function and conflict in nineteenth-century pauper burial', *Social History*, 3 (2005).

⁶¹ Jones carried out a comparison of relief types between the parishes of Amport and Ringwood in Hampshire. In both parishes shoes were the most popular item requested; in Amport fuel came second and in Ringwood rent. Jones noted that the overseers based their decisions on genuine need: Jones, 'Clothing the Poor'.

⁶² ESRO, Alciston overseers' expenditure books, 1746-1825, PAR227/31/4.

⁶³ K. Williams described poor relief as 'supplementary': K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: 1981), 3. Tomkins and King referred to the possibility that poor relief was insufficient on its own to sustain families: Tomkins and King, 'Introduction', *The Poor in England*, 9.

totalled £175 but dropped dramatically to £11 in 1802.⁶⁴ However, the flexibility of the relief system could also work against relief recipients as officials might reduce certain payments or benefits during times of increased pressure. Baugh noted that overseers were providing flour at reduced cost during crisis years when food prices were very high in the counties of Sussex, Kent and Essex. He also commented on the flexibility of this form of relief which could easily be withdrawn once the crisis had passed.⁶⁵

There were also less common forms of relief which were clearly aimed at enabling individuals to become independent from the parish and these are again referenced in the records of several of the parishes. Men were given money towards carpenter's tools and leather for shoemaking. There are examples of parishes loaning money to individuals. The 1819 Sturges Bourne Act enabled Select Vestries to provide loans rather than relief on the understanding that the loan would be repaid.⁶⁶ The Hailsham overseer lent Edward Carney five guineas to buy a cow in 1803 and the parish agreed to pay for the keep of Thomas Smith's cow until the calf was fat enough to be taken away. In 1825 John Akehurst was loaned £13 to buy a horse; the money had to be repaid within a year or the parish would take ownership of the horse. In the port of Newhaven the overseers bought Thomas Mantell a boat; he had to repay the parish over a period of time. This Newhaven example is an indication of the slight variations in the type of relief provided based on the local economy.⁶⁷

In addition to helping parishioners to set themselves up in a trade, overseers also provided work either as a supplement to relief or during times of unemployment. In all of the parishes with records that include details of relief provision, individual paupers, male and female, were paid for work such as repairing shoes, knitting, spinning, washing, mending and nursing. This practice of using parishioners to carry out necessary tasks was also apparent in other studies of the OPL.⁶⁸ However, of particular interest for this study is the work offered to able-bodied labourers; single men and those with families. Most employment was either on the roads or in agriculture, working on local farms. In Hailsham during the 1820s the overseers adopted a billeting system whereby all householders with a rental of £35 should take one labourer and

⁶⁴ ESRO, Loughton overseers' accounts, 1682-1921, PAR409/31/1; Alciston overseers' expenditure books, 1746-1825, PAR227/31/1-5.

⁶⁵ Baugh, 'The Cost'.

⁶⁶ Samantha Shave, *Pauper Policies*.

⁶⁷ ESRO, Hailsham vestry minutes, PAR353/ 12/1-27; Newhaven Select Vestry minutes, 1822, P426/1/3.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*; Shave, 'The Dependent Poor?'

those with a rental of £65 should take two. The parishes of Berwick and Rotherfield also had a roundsman system in place in 1832 which was similar to billeting.⁶⁹ These schemes were unpopular amongst some landowners; in 1827 Samuel Flint wrote to the churchwardens in Hailsham complaining that he had no work for the men.⁷⁰ Carl Griffin has referred to the anger of many ratepayers in Sussex against the roundsman system as they either had to find or create work for labourers or subsidise farmers by funding labourers through the rates.⁷¹ This negative view was shared in Whitehall and the billeting system was one of the targets of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834.

A work scheme which central government appeared to regard more favourably was the provision of land for labourers to cultivate. When the Uckfield union was formed the Assistant Commissioner, W. Hawley, suggested that land should be used by the new workhouse to provide 'outdoor employment'. There are several examples of Sussex parishes, notably in the Weald, hiring farms or blocks of land during the final years of the OPL. Both Hellingly and East Hoathly had parish farms.⁷² The overseers' records for Hailsham and Newhaven refer to the parish taking over land so that the poor could grow crops such as potatoes, but there is no mention of these schemes or to the provision of allotments in the other study parishes. Yet, Jeremy Burchardt has identified at least thirty-two Sussex parishes which had allotments during this period. Landowners including the Earl of Chichester, who became chairman of the Newhaven Union, and Viscount Gage, who became an ex officio member of the Firle Union, both supported the provision of allotments and were founder members of the Sussex Association for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes. The association, formed in 1831, aimed to improve the lives of labourers by offering land at a fair rent.⁷³

Occasionally the records refer to men being paid due to no work or to having their wages supplemented. The Laughton, Chiddingly, Rotherfield, Uckfield and Lewes overseers mention

⁶⁹ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834.

⁷⁰ C. Robertson, *Hailsham and its Environs* (London: 1982), 147

⁷¹ C. Griffin, 'Parish Farms and the poor law: a response to unemployment in rural southern England, c. 1815-35', *Agricultural History Review*, 59 (2011), 176-198.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (Woodbridge: 2002), 61; *Quarterly Report of the Sussex Association for improving the condition of the labouring classes*, No.1 (Lindfield: 1831). The first quarterly report of the association referred to accounts from a farming project in Lindfield where labourers were housed in cottages with an acre and a quarter of land. The labourers managed to gain 2s. a week throughout the year by growing potatoes and corn on their allotments.

paying men when they were out of work without necessarily providing employment, while the overseers in Hailsham, Laughton and Hellingly occasionally refer to making up wages. These references in the sources occur during the 1820s and early-1830s. Mark Blaug has argued that paying an allowance in aid of wages was closely linked to the roundsman or billeting system discussed above; both approaches involved the ratepayers supporting men during times of unemployment.⁷⁴ The schemes were coming under increasing criticism by the 1820s. In 1824 a Select Committee was set up to examine labourers' wages and witnesses complained that the system of making up wages encouraged idleness. Results from the Select Committee indicate that the practice of subsidising labourers' wages was most prevalent in the southeast but not confined to that area.⁷⁵ Getting rid of the allowance system and the supposedly negative effect it had on labourers was again high on the priorities of the Poor Law Commissioners when they sought to reform the poor laws in 1834. Other studies also refer to the overseers making additional cash payments for short periods when men and boys had no work. In both Campton and Shefford there was an increase in this form of support in the early-nineteenth century. In Terling labourers received additional relief payments after 1815 which suggests that they were either without work or unable to earn their usual income.⁷⁶

One way that the overseers could help labourers' families was to provide support for their children. In Chapter Three it was noted that many families in the Sussex parishes had five or more children and it was often these families that turned to the parish. One direct way to help such families financially was to pay an allowance for every child over a certain number of children in the family. The controversy regarding paying child allowances and the concern amongst contemporaries that it could lead to population growth has already been referred to. The evidence from eastern Sussex is that this practice was prevalent, notably in the Weald, by the time that the NPL was introduced. Out of the eleven study parishes which responded to the government enquiries in 1832, four were providing a child allowance in the form of a cash payment: Hailsham and Hellingly gave an allowance to families with more than two children

⁷⁴ Blaug, 'The Myth'. The discussion of 'allowances' in the historiography is complex as the term has been applied to varying types of support including child allowances and allowances in aid of wages. The payment of allowances by relief officials dates back to the 1790s and the Speenhamland system when family incomes were supplemented and adjusted in line with the price of bread.

⁷⁵ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 57.

⁷⁶ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*; French, 'How dependent?' The detail in the Sussex records would make it possible to further develop this discussion of the work available in each parish, but it is beyond the scope of this study to do so.

and Chiddingly and Alciston to families with more than three children. Large families were provided with a flour allowance in Rotherfield and Waldron and had their rent paid in Glynde. The parishes of Lewes, Newhaven and Berwick replied that no allowances were provided while the Rottingdean overseer recalled that a flour allowance had been supplied 'fourteen years ago' but was no longer continued. The Laughton overseers did not send a reply to the Commissioners in 1832 but their accounts record the payment of allowances to families with more than two children at 1s. a week until the child was six months old and then at 1s. 6d.⁷⁷

There are also examples of overseers providing child allowances in other counties in the southeast and Midlands. Williams found that this form of payment tended to be short-term in response to crises in Campton and Shefford, notably at the beginning of the nineteenth century when food prices were exceptionally high and also after the war. The allowances were more regularly paid in the rural parish.⁷⁸ This form of relief was as unpopular in the minds of those wishing to reform the poor laws during the final years of the OPL as paying allowances in aid of wages. It was argued that the former could encourage people to have large families and the latter could encourage indolence. In fact, as Sokoll has pointed out, both allowances had a similar end in relieving families in times of economic crisis.⁷⁹

A form of support that was common in all of the Sussex parishes was the boarding out of children, both those from larger families and also orphans. Overseers placed older children in households where they would receive board and lodging, probably in return for some domestic duties. There is little discussion in the literature on the practice of boarding out yet in Sussex this was clearly a regular practice throughout the final decades of the OPL, including the late-eighteenth century.⁸⁰ The cost of a child's keep is generally recorded in the accounts and was usually paid by the parish at a rate of approximately 2s. a week. It was also the role of the overseer to pay to clothe the children. In the parishes for this study there are examples of overseers, churchwardens and other vestry members taking children from poor families into

⁷⁷ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834; ESRO, Laughton overseers' accounts, 1682-1921, PAR409/31/1.

⁷⁸ S. Williams, 'Malthus, marriage and poor law allowances revisited: a Bedfordshire case study, 1770-1834', *The Agricultural History Review*, 52 (Jan. 2004), 56-82; Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices', 103; French, 'How Dependent?', 206. French did not refer specifically to child allowances but he referred to additional allowances based on family size after 1808.

⁷⁹ Sokoll noted that there is some confusion in the historiography regarding the various types of allowances. He concluded that there can be no one universal definition of Speenhamland as overseers in different parishes adopted varying allowance schemes: Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices', 104.

⁸⁰ In Laughton there were twenty children 'put out' to families in 1790: ESRO, Laughton overseers' accounts, 1682-1921, PAR/409/31/1/1.

their own homes. They were often the wealthier members of the community and would have been aware of which parishioners needed support. There are also instances in the Sussex records of children being placed in-service from the workhouse. In fact providing indoor support to children was a further means that overseers could employ to support large families. There are regular references throughout the period 1800 to 1835 to children being taken into the workhouse from families who were not coping on the available relief.⁸¹

Other family members were occasionally being paid to care for children. There are examples in the Hailsham, Laughton and Rotherfield records of grandparents receiving small cash payments from the parish to support their grandchildren.⁸² It is possible that family members took in orphan children of relatives but don't appear in the records as they were financially independent. Within the historiography there has been considerable focus on the importance of kinship as a form of support. Pat Thane and Hollen Lees have argued that kinship could provide a vital safety net to the poor, and King has found that the kin poor were more likely to need poor relief. It is clear from the overseers' records and the censuses for the study parishes that many people had relatives living in the same parish and it appears that it was often members of the same extended families that required relief. It is therefore likely that a number of relief recipients had kin living locally but they were too poor to support their relatives or, as in the case of the grandparents above, they could only support family members if they received help from the parish.⁸³

Another form of long-term support for children was apprenticeship partly funded by the parish. There are only a few references to apprenticeships in the Sussex records, mainly in the town of Lewes where a wider range of trades was available, and in Newhaven where boys were apprenticed to sailors. Premiums could cost between £15 and £20; the parish often agreed to pay part of the premium, and then left it up to the employer and apprentice's family to complete the negotiation. This type of relief had the advantage of providing children with a trade so that they could be independent as adults. Jane Humphries has suggested that apprenticeship could be a means of escaping the, 'never-ending grind of agricultural labour.' A

⁸¹ Jones and Humphries both quote examples of boys being taken into the workhouse and then placed in employment or apprenticeship: P. Jones, "I cannot keep my place"; Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, 197

⁸² ESRO, Hailsham poor relief accounts, 1802-1835, PAR353/31/1/1-5; Laughton overseers' accounts, 1682-1921, PAR409/31/1; Rotherfield overseers' relief request book, 1810-1845, PAR465/7.

⁸³ P. Thane, *Old Age in English History. Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: 2000); Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*; King, *Poverty and welfare*.

further advantage to the parish of placing a child in a trade in another parish is that they might acquire a settlement there. Within the literature there have been suggestions that apprenticeship could lead to exploitation and potential cruelty, on the other hand it could provide children with economic independence. A child's experience of being placed with an employer might depend on whether parish officials maintained an interest in the arrangement. The Webbs suggested that the parish relinquished responsibility once an apprenticeship had been set up. However, Katrina Honeyman and Humphries have argued that parish officials followed up on placements to check they were suitable and that in many instances pauper apprenticeship led to economic self-sufficiency.⁸⁴

In some respects, there was often little distinction between the treatment of older children and adults during this period as many boys and girls as young as ten were expected to work.⁸⁵ In one of the wealden parishes, Hailsham, there are specific references in the overseers' accounts to 'boys' work'. In the year 1826/27 several boys were taken on by ten different employers; one was in trade, one was in trade and agriculture and the others were all farmers. The boys included those from the workhouse and from large pauper families. They were generally paid 3d. to 6d. a day. Conversely in the wealden parish of Chiddingly there are references to the parish receiving an income from boys' work. From 1818 to the early-1820s the overseers recorded a small annual income of £8 to £10. It is possible that the work was carried out in the workhouse but this is not specified. The Rotherfield overseers include income from the work of boys in the workhouse in their accounts and in Berwick during the early-1830s the two overseers each employed four or five boys to work on their farms.⁸⁶

One final type of support for children that was mentioned in some of the overseers' accounts in the study parishes was schooling. Payments for a few children to attend the 'subscription school' occur regularly in the Lewes accounts. The school covered all of Lewes and children

⁸⁴ S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law Policy* (London: 1910: reprint, 1963); J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: 2010), 256-305; K. Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820* (Hampshire: 2007), 22.

⁸⁵ There are examples from biographies of children working from the age of nine or ten: Humphries, *Childhood and Labour*, 173.

⁸⁶ ESRO, Hailsham accounts of boys' work, 1826-1827, PAR353/31/5/5; Chiddingly, overseers' accounts, 1817-1835, P/292/8/2-4; Rotherfield overseers' relief request book, 1817/18, PAR465/7; Berwick, overseers' accounts, 1683-1885, PAR239/31. Little attention has been given in other parish studies to income in addition to poor rates which is recorded in the overseers' accounts. Income could consist of rent payments, support for bastard children and work both in and out of a workhouse. The amounts were generally small and in all parishes rate payments provided the bulk of poor relief income.

could attend from five years upwards. Subscriptions from local residents ranged from £1 to £5 a year; Viscount Gage from nearby Firlie Place gave £5 a year. The school was taken over by the workhouse following the formation of the Lewes union in 1835. Other parishes with references to schooling funded by the parish include Rotherfield, Berwick and Newhaven. In Rotherfield and Berwick the accounts discuss paying a schoolteacher a wage of seven pounds a year. In Newhaven payments were made for schooling the parish children in 1802 at a cost of £3. 6s. and there are charity records which refer to the continuation of a charity school in the 1820s.⁸⁷ Alannah Tomkins has suggested that references to the parish paying for schooling during the OPL are not common. In her study of Oxford parishes she only found one reference to a boy being paid 1s. a week by the parish to attend school.⁸⁸

However, some parishes would have been able to provide schooling for the poor through other sources. As noted in the section above on relief numbers, at least two Sussex parishes, Rotherfield and Newhaven, had charitable bequests of over £20 a year to pay for schooling. There are also records of charity schools in Waldron, Uckfield and Glynde which date from the eighteenth century.⁸⁹ The bequest in Glynde stipulated that boys should be taught reading and girls needlework. Humphries noted that endowing schools was a popular charitable bequest as educating the poor to a basic level was regarded as a way of ensuring a stable working class. Sunday Schools could also offer some basic education to children; in Hailsham a Sunday School was established in 1815 and children from the workhouse were expected to attend.⁹⁰

So far in this section on the nature of relief similar practices have been noted in the study parishes suggesting that intra-regional variations within Sussex, and more broadly within the southeast, were minimal in terms of the range of support offered to the poor. Where regional differences between the Weald and the Downs in Sussex have been identified they have been

⁸⁷ ESRO, Lewes, vestry minutes, PAR412/12/2; Lewes Subscription School, PAR410/25/1; Rotherfield overseers' account book, 1830-1835, PAR465/6/13; Berwick overseers' accounts, 1683-1885, PAR239/31; Newhaven quarterly accounts of churchwardens and overseers, 1700-1848, P426/1/1; Reports of the Commissioners to inquire concerning Charities and Education of the poor in England: Sussex, 1815-1839, ACC 10182/7/33.

⁸⁸ A. Tomkins, *The Experience of urban poverty 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester: 2006), 183.

⁸⁹ ESRO, Reports of the Commissioners, 1815-1839.

⁹⁰ ESRO, Hailsham vestry minutes, PAR353/12/1/12. Education wasn't compulsory during this period; however, there were a range of schools which children from the labouring classes might attend including charity schools, Sunday schools, Dame schools and workhouse schools. Labouring families would have found it difficult to pay for schooling even at a few pence a week. Children often attended school intermittently and were taught rudimentary reading and writing: D. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: 1981), 95-97; D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: 1989), 6-10.

in the scale of relief. Far more men were given employment and more children were boarded out in the Weald than on the Downs but the overseers in both areas made use of these practices. It could be argued that the experience of the outdoor poor in this study was therefore quite similar under the OPL. However, the situation regarding indoor relief was less clear cut as it was not available in all of the parishes prior to 1834. As the discussion now turns to indoor support, two key debates in the historiography will be considered: whether there were intra-regional differences in this form of relief, and whether there is evidence that it can be described as harsh or humane under the OPL.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is considerable confusion in parish records regarding the distinction between poor houses and workhouses, which could often be called a poor house. It was common for parishes to own small properties occupied by poor residents, often with their rent paid and with the cottages ready furnished. These cottages were referred to as poor houses. The study parishes with extant records all refer to providing poor houses at low or no rent, but they did not all have a workhouse. There were a variety of ways that parishes could establish a workhouse, either singly or as a group, and there was a number of legal watersheds when separate attempts were made to clarify the purpose and function of these institutions.⁹¹

Table 4.5 below shows which parishes had a workhouse in 1803 and/or in 1832 according to the government surveys of those years. In Newhaven the conversion of a row of cottages into a small workhouse was recorded in 1822 in the vestry minutes but not mentioned in the 1832 survey. There is a reference to a workhouse in the Rottingdean vestry minutes during the 1780s and in the 1803 survey but it was no longer being used by 1832.⁹² While the Laughton and Piddinghoe overseers did not reply to the 1832 government questionnaires, information in their accounts indicates whether or not indoor support was available in the parish in the early-1830s. In addition to Newhaven, three other parishes appear to have established an OPL workhouse during the first decades of the nineteenth century although it was more common

⁹¹ Knatchbull's Act, 1723, gave a legal framework which enabled parishes to set up a workhouse individually or in combination; the act introduced the use of the workhouse 'test' so that the workhouse became a deterrent and was seen as a place of last resort by the poor. Gilbert's Act, 1782, allowed workhouses to be restricted to the old, sick, infirm and orphans and enabled parishes to provide outdoor relief to the able-bodied. Parishes could form unions to operate a common workhouse. Alongside this permissive legislation, parishes could also obtain a Local Act to set up a workhouse either singly or in a group, this was often a popular measure in towns where there were a number of small parishes which joined to form a corporation.

⁹² ESRO, Newhaven vestry minutes, 1800-1829, PAR426/12/1810-1829/2; Rottingdean vestry minutes, 1710-1828, PAR466/12/1/2.

for them to be built in the eighteenth century.⁹³ These developments regarding the provision of indoor relief are a further indication that the welfare system was not static during the final years of the OPL but changed as varying economic pressures impacted parishes.

Table 4.5 Parishes with workhouses according to the government surveys of 1803 and 1832⁹⁴

Parish	Workhouse in 1803	Number of adults	1822 Parish Records Number of residents	Workhouse in 1832	Number of adults and children
Hailsham W	Yes	31		Yes	24
Laughton W	Yes	9		Yes	10 - 20
Chiddingly W	Yes	21		Yes	22
Hellingly W	No	-		Yes	42
Uckfield W	Yes	15 adults, 12 children in school of industry		No information	
Rotherfield W	Yes	27		Yes	Thirty-two
East Hoathly W	No	-		No information	
Waldron W	Yes	29		Yes	Twenty-nine
Newhaven D	No	-	Ten	No	No
Rottingdean D	Yes	6		No	No
Piddinghoe D	No	-		No	-
Rodmell D	No	-		No information	
Alciston D	No	-		No	No
Glynde D	No	-		No	No
Berwick D	No	-		Yes	18
Lewes	No	-		Yes	29

It is clear from Table 4.5 that workhouses were more commonly used in the Weald and in Lewes. These parishes had larger populations than those on the Downs and it may not have been viable to build a workhouse in a parish with only a few hundred residents. The size of the study workhouses in terms of the number of inmates was quite varied ranging from ten residents in Newhaven to sixty in Hailsham. Government and parish records show that the indoor poor were mainly the elderly and children but there were also a few families, predominantly those of agricultural labourers.⁹⁵ The considerable range in the number of indoor paupers in the study parishes is reflected in other counties in the southeast in the 1803

⁹³ P. Higginbotham, *Workhouses of London and the South East* (Stroud: 2019), 256.

⁹⁴ *Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of the poor in England*, PP 1803-4, C.175; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners, 1834*.

⁹⁵ ESRO, Newhaven minutes of the meetings of the Select Vestry, 1821-23, P/426/1/3; Hailsham, accounts of Bartholomew Osborne, 1827-35, PAR353/31/9/1; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners, 1834*.

government survey. In Kent, Essex and Norfolk the number of residents ranged from as few as two to sixty or seventy in most rural institutions. However, in each county there are examples of much larger urban workhouses. In Sussex the Brighton OPL workhouse held up to 400 people; in Tonbridge, Kent, there were 130 inmates while in Norfolk the Kings Lynn workhouse housed 289 people and the Norwich workhouse 689 people.⁹⁶

The difference in workhouse sizes within counties meant that conditions might have varied considerably. This gives further support to the suggestion made by a number of historians, and noted in Chapter Two, that the experiences of the indoor poor were wide-ranging. The size of an institution might have been a factor in determining how the poor felt about indoor relief as smaller institutions could seem more homely. For example, the description of the Rotherfield workhouse in Sussex in 1780 is more akin to a home than an institution. The workhouse had a parlour, pantry, sollar (sic), hall, kitchen and brewhouse. Accommodation for paupers was in sixteen chambers with stools and one or two beds in each. Two chambers had chairs and a chest and may have been occupied by the governor and his family. As the total number of inmates was approximately thirty in the early-nineteenth century it is probable that two people shared a chamber.⁹⁷

However, a more important factor than the size of the workhouse when considering the experience of inmates would have been how the institution was run. Many large workhouses were 'farmed out' to private contractors notably in London and Norfolk.⁹⁸ There may have been more scope for ill treatment of residents when direct oversight was removed from the parish vestry. There is evidence in the parish records that at least four of the study workhouses were run by governors: Hailsham, Chiddingly, Lewes and Berwick. Bartholomew Osborne was in post from 1811 to 1835 as governor of the Hailsham workhouse. The records refer to income from manufactory which went to the parish suggesting that the governor did not profit from paupers' work. The Lewes parish rather than the governor also received any income from the industry of inmates. In these examples the vestry appears to have maintained quite a close oversight of the operation of the workhouse which may have benefited the indoor poor.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *Abstract of answers and returns*, 1803-4.

⁹⁷ ESRO, Rotherfield, vestry minutes, 1725-1839, PAR/465/12/1.

⁹⁸ P. Higginbotham, *The Workhouse Encyclopedia* (Stroud: 2012).

⁹⁹ ESRO, Hailsham, vestry minutes, 1794-1835, PAR 353/12/1/1-26; Lewes, vestry minutes, 1800-1828, PAR412/12/1-6.

While limited information can be gained from parish records concerning the treatment of people in workhouses, there are some indications of harsh conditions. In Hailsham men were sent to Langney beach to collect cobbles in a cart which were used to build walls in the parish; this was understandably unpopular and on occasion led to riots. In fact, there were a number of disturbances in this parish prior to the NPL, indicating that parishioners were resistant to measures imposed by the vestry. This is important as there is mounting evidence in the historiography that the poor were exerting agency with regard to their treatment.¹⁰⁰ In the Lewes workhouse there are indications that elements of indoor relief were strict and arguably humiliating as the inmates were made to wear 'yellow hose' if they misbehaved. Williams cites examples of mothers of unmarried children being forced to wear clothes that would mark them out and cause humiliation under the NPL suggesting a continuation in the way that some paupers were treated following the PLAA.¹⁰¹ Yet, Jones, King and Thompson dispute the traditional viewpoint that workhouse clothing under the NPL was intended to be degrading or humiliating or worn as a 'uniform'. Clothes could have a number of purposes and be of value to paupers. It was not the intention of the Poor Law Commissioners that the indoor poor should be dressed the same; it was up to guardians to source clothes locally.¹⁰²

There are important references in the Lewes and Hailsham accounts to men being offered the workhouse when they asked for work, or relief, in 1818 and in the 1820s. In Newhaven there are examples of the poor being given the choice of having their allowance reduced or being offered 'the house'. This indicates that, as Jones and King have argued, indoor relief was being used as a deterrent measure at least ten to twenty years before the Poor Law Commissioners adopted this strategy.¹⁰³ There are other indications in the Sussex records of a punitive element to indoor relief under the OPL. In the Lewes workhouse conditions may have deteriorated during the first decades of the nineteenth century as the cost to the parish of maintaining the

¹⁰⁰ C. Robertson, *Hailsham and its Environs*, 137. For a discussion of pauper agency see: T. Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London 1800-1834', *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000); Jones and King, 'From Petition to Pauper Letter'; King, *Writing the Lives*.

¹⁰¹ ESRO, Lewes vestry minutes, 1823-28, PAR412/12/6. Williams referred to unmarried mothers being made to wear a blue or yellow uniform in the St Martin in the Fields workhouse: Samantha Williams, *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700-1850: Pregnancy, the Poor Law and Provision* (London: 2018), 132.

¹⁰² P. Jones, S. King, and K. Thompson, 'Clothing the New Poor Law Workhouse in the Nineteenth Century', *Rural History*, 32 (2021), 127-148.

¹⁰³ ESRO, Lewes, vestry minutes, PAR412/31/3/2; Hailsham vestry minutes, PAR353/12/1/16; Newhaven Select Vestry minutes, PAR426/12/2; P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England: Bearing Witness* (London: 2020), 5.

indoor poor was 4s. 4d. per pauper per week in 1809 but it had dropped to 2s. 9d. per head by 1832.¹⁰⁴ In the two parishes where a workhouse was clearly established during the early-nineteenth century there is evidence from the parish accounts that the overseers were imposing a stricter regime, by the 1820s in Newhaven and the early-1830s in Berwick, and indoor relief was an essential part of this regime.¹⁰⁵

So far the discussion on both outdoor and indoor relief has tried to gain some understanding of the experience of the poor in the eastern Sussex parishes under the OPL. Unfortunately no autobiographies of paupers from this area have been identified to date but it is possible to look more closely at the treatment received by some individuals and to track their support over a number of years from the parish records. Several households received relief over a sustained period of time making it possible to build individual case studies. Table 4.6 below shows the range of support given to four labourers in the sample parishes of Hailsham, Lewes, Newhaven and Berwick who were all married with families during the final years of the OPL. All four men received relief over a prolonged period of time. The support given to John Heywood was unusual in Newhaven where only two or three families received regular help.

The information in the table reflects the discussion so far on the nature of relief as the men clearly received a similar range of support with the exception of indoor relief which was only provided in Hailsham to two of Nicholas Bignell's older children. The cost of maintaining the children was expensive at ten pounds a year which may be why the parish officials had decided to take the children out of the workhouse by 1821. The town parish in Lewes was able to provide payment in return for employment for a more sustained period of time than the other parishes. Richard Henley was employed as a carter on a farm as well as digging flints and street sweeping.

¹⁰⁴ ESRO, Lewes, accounts of out-relief, 1819-1834, PAR412/31/3/1-3.

¹⁰⁵ ESRO, Newhaven Select Vestry minutes, 1821-23, P/426/1/3; Berwick overseers' accounts, 1683-1885, PAR239/31.

Table 4.6 Case studies of able-bodied labourers married with children¹⁰⁶

Parish	Hailsham W Nicholas Bignell five children by 1814	Lewes Richard Henley five children in 1816	Newhaven D John Heywood minimum three children	Berwick D Henry Marten four children
1804-1813	Individual requests for clothes, wood, cash, feed for his hog and repair of his oven.			Cash pension 4s. 6d. a week, rent.
1815 Annual total	Cash, clothes, fuel, flour and peas, salt to salt his hog, rent, maintenance of two girls in the workhouse at an annual cost of £10. £24. 7s. 6d.	1819 Flour, clothes, rent, cash payment for labour at flint digging and street sweeping. £25.		Cash pension and rent. Approximately £9.
1821 Annual total	Cash, fuel, rent, Labour between 6s. and 10s. a week but not every month. £17.	Flour, clothes, rent. £30 relief + £22 in family earnings possibly including parish work. In 1822/23 relief was reduced by £10 as less flour and no clothes.	Cash pension 8s. a month, clothes, rent in a poor house. One child apprenticed at 5s. a week, wife paid for nursing. £15.10s.	Cash pension, rent, keep for one child. Approximately £14. (In 1823 cash changes to flour, rent, clothes).
1827 Annual total	Mainly flour, small cash payments, rent, fuel. £5 12s. 8d.	Parish labour, eldest daughter in service in Brighton, the parish paid 1s. 6d. a week towards her keep. Not available.	1826 Flour at 10s. a month, rent. £17.16s.	Cash pension 8s. a week, rent. £22.8s.
1830	Flour, a little cash.	No mention in records.	No mention in records.	Individuals not mentioned.
1833	Labour, a little cash.	Casual payments.	No mention in records.	Died aged 67.

Total annual costs of supporting the sample families varied between each parish. However, the cost of supporting families also varied within parishes; it could range from £5 a year to payments of over £30 a year in many of the study parishes. Relief varied over time for individual families. Table 4.6 shows that on different occasions between 1821 and 1827 in each

¹⁰⁶ Information in Table 4.6 is taken from the overseers' accounts for Hailsham, Lewes, Newhaven and Berwick listed in the bibliography.

parish payments of cash to the families were reduced or ended and replaced by increased supplies of flour. However, in the case of John Heywood his annual flour allowance cost 10s. a month which was more than his cash pension of 8s. a month. Therefore, replacing cash with flour may not always have saved the parish money. These case studies demonstrate that poor relief could be erratic and the paupers could not have relied on receiving a regular income throughout their working lives.¹⁰⁷

Case studies also illustrate the flexibility of the OPL as although the range of relief in the parishes was similar, paupers were treated differently which agrees with Shave's findings in her detailed examination of eight individual relief recipients in rural Dorset during the final decades of the OPL. Shave noted the flexibility of the system in the parish of Motcombe where people tended to access support when they needed it. Shave and King have both discussed the 'semi-autonomous' character of the parish relief system and the discretion that overseers had in how they helped the poor.¹⁰⁸ Sokoll noted that in Ardleigh officials were able to adapt to changing economic circumstances during the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ The experience of Nicholas Bignell in Hailsham appears to demonstrate that relief could be adapted to meet the changing economic climate. As more people turned to the parish in the 1820s, his payments were reduced and he was given some temporary work. This discussion of the flexibility of the system has regarded it in a positive light. Yet, Crowther has suggested that parishes were reluctant to provide relief according to a regular scale as this would encourage paupers to demand their 'rights'.¹¹⁰ On the other hand the Hailsham vestry refused to increase one person's request for an increased pension as he was 'placed on the same footing with the other paupers.' They were possibly trying to maintain a balance between individual need and a certain 'fairness' and also of course minimising costs.¹¹¹

Variations in the size of paupers' household incomes is apparent in the case studies and is very well illustrated in the Lewes accounts of outdoor relief as they include a calculation of the average amount of money per head in a family each week taking into account combined relief

¹⁰⁷ Shave considered the individual experience of paupers in Motcombe; she highlighted the individual treatment of relief recipients who tended to access support intermittently: Shave, 'The Dependent Poor?'

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 89; King, *Writing the lives*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices', 105.

¹¹⁰ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 14.

¹¹¹ ESRO, Hailsham vestry minutes, 1816-1817, PAR 353/12/1/13.

and any earnings.¹¹² Those households that relied only on relief had a lower amount per head than those who were able to earn. Widows without work seemed to fare worse; Elizabeth Goodyer was thirty-one with one child in 1820, she had no independent earnings and the weekly income per head was 1s. 6d. in her family of two. In contrast William Morris was an elderly labourer in his seventies living with his wife. Both earned small sums of money and received flour, clothes and some cash payments. The weekly income per head in their family was 5s. 7d. These accounts provide interesting information on the amount of earnings that wives and children brought into the family. The household income of Richard Henley (one of the case studies above) included his wife's and childrens' earnings in 1821. His wife only earned money occasionally, ranging from a few shillings a week to a total of £1. 6s. in early-September, but the children had a more regular income of £1 a month; the records don't specify how many children contributed to this sum. Nicola Verdon used the replies to the 1832 government survey to assess female and children's wages. She concluded that the mean annual wage for a woman was £5 11s. 2d. and for a child £10 11s. 11d. Henley's children's earnings of approximately £12 a year would be quite typical, particularly if only one child was working.¹¹³

It has been apparent in this discussion on the nature of poor relief that parish officials were able to exercise discretion and flexibility. However, this was tempered by the need to maintain the support of the ratepayers who funded the relief. In the final section of this chapter on the OPL the focus switches to those who supplied relief, the ratepayers, overseers, and vestry. Given the varied size of the study parishes and the differing rural and town economies, it is possible that there were intra-regional variations in the number of people involved in arranging poor relief and in the background of those individuals. It is also important to consider whether the approach of officials changed over time as they faced an increasing pressure on the welfare system.

¹¹² It is rare to see this level of detail in relief studies.

¹¹³ ESRO, Lewes, accounts of out-relief, 1819-1834, PAR412/31/3/1-3. N. Verdon, 'The Rural Labour Market in the Early Nineteenth Century: Women and Children's Employment, Family Income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review*, 55 (2002), 299-323.

4.3: The Supply of Poor Relief

While considerable focus has been given in the historiography to relief recipients, few studies have considered the people who funded and arranged relief.¹¹⁴ Yet supporting the poor was an integral part of parish economics and politics and questions need to be asked regarding the people who paid for relief and those who administered it. Most of the money spent on poor relief was raised through levying a rate on the value of property owned or rented in parishes.¹¹⁵ The total collected in rates would depend on the number of properties/ratepayers and the rate in the pound set by members of the parish vestry, often on the advice of the overseer(s) who had first-hand knowledge of the parish poor. In this section on the supply of relief, the profile of the ratepayers and the amount of money raised in rates is considered and compared across the study parishes during the time period 1800-1835. Secondly, the composition of the vestries is analysed and the attitude of vestry members and overseers towards the parish poor discussed through an analysis of relief policies and individual profiles. Personalities mattered, not only in smaller parishes where one or two individuals had considerable control over the provision of relief, but also in larger parishes where the main landowner or tenant farmer exerted influence in the vestry. This section will question whether there were intra-regional variations in the profile of officials and in their approach to providing support for the poor and the subsequent experience of the poor.

Table 4.7 below provides data on the proportion of parishioners who paid rates in the three census years 1811, 1821 and 1831 in the study parishes with extant rate books.¹¹⁶ The number of people who owned or rented property over the value of £10 and £100 pounds is included in the table. Ten pounds has been selected as it was considered by officials to be a reasonable rental which would entitle owners to have a settlement, and later the vote in national elections, while £100 would indicate a wealthy resident.¹¹⁷ This analysis reveals interesting

¹¹⁴ As already noted, Williams discussed the profile of ratepayers in the town of Shefford in Bedford: Williams, *Poverty, Gender*.

¹¹⁵ Other sources of income in the parish accounts include rents, occasionally payment from other parishes, men paying for their bastard child, work provided by paupers, (in Lewes this included money from selling the manure collected by the road sweepers). However, these various sources of income were very small in comparison with the money raised from rating.

¹¹⁶ Information on the rates in East Hoathly and Waldron are not available. The proportion of the population paying rates in Table 4.7 is deceptively low as it indicates individuals rather than their families.

¹¹⁷ The 1832 Reform Act gave the vote to householders in boroughs living in property worth £10; the £10 franchise was extended to counties in 1884.

information about the rate paying base in the various parishes. The proportion of the parish population who were ratepayers was higher in the larger wealden parishes than the downland parishes with the exception of Laughton which was the smallest of the wealden parishes in the study. However, the highest percentage of the population paying rates was in the town of Lewes. The figure of sixteen per cent in Lewes was similar to the figure of twenty per cent for the town of Shefford in Williams' study. In most of the eastern Sussex parishes the proportion shows little variation across the time scale 1811-1831, when taking into account any rise in population.¹¹⁸

Table 4.7 Total number of ratepayers as a proportion of the parish population, the number of ratepayers and proportion of ratepayers with property valued over £10 and the number of ratepayers with property valued over £100 during each census year.¹¹⁹

	1811 No. of ratepayers	Over £10	Over £100	1821 No. of ratepayers	Over £10	Over £100	1831 No. of ratepayer s	Over £10	Over £100
<u>Hailsham W</u>	163 (12%)	81 50%	2	168 (13%)	83 49%	4	200 (15%)	82 41%	4
<u>Laughton W</u>	46 (7%)	25 54%	6	47 (6%)	19 40%	8	54 (6%)	22 41%	9
<u>Chiddingly W</u>	71 (10%)	32 45%	4	100 (11%)	38 38%	9	105 (12%)	41 39%	8
Hellingly W	115 (11%)	49 43%	7	120 (9%)	48 40%	8	148 (10%)	66 45%	5
Uckfield W	130 (14%)	30 23%	5	157 (14%)	34 22%	4	163 (13%)	36 22%	3
Rotherfield W	256 (12%)	77 30%	4	280 (10%)	76 27%	5	290 (9%)	109 38%	11
Newhaven D	-			114 (12%)	7 6%	1	114 (12%)	2 ≤1	1
Piddinghoe D	9 (4%)	4 44%	4	9 (4%)	5 56%	3	11 (5%)	11 100%	5
Rodmell D	8 (4%)	6 75%	2	7 (2%)	4 57%	3	8 (2%)	4 50%	2
Alciston D	9 (5%)	5 56%	2	12 (5%)	7 58%	2	-		
Berwick D	8 (5%)	7 87%	2	7 (4%)	5 71%	2	9 (4%)	4 44%	2
Lewes	190 (16%)	13 7%	1	284 (16%)	10 4%	1	420 (18%)	17 4%	2

It is also apparent in Table 4.7 that in the town parish of Lewes and in Newhaven only a very small percentage of the ratepaying population lived in properties worth £10 or more compared with the predominantly rural parishes. By 1831 one hundred per cent of ratepayers in Piddinghoe lived in properties worth over £10. Caution is needed when considering the results from Lewes as the parish of St John Sub Castro was not necessarily representative of the whole town. In one of the other parishes, Southover, there were several households living in substantial properties. It is not unusual for wealthier households to be clustered in one area in

¹¹⁸ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 73-75.

¹¹⁹ Data in Table 4.7 is taken from the rate books for each parish listed in the bibliography and the censuses.

a town and this appears to have been the case. Nevertheless, the contrast between Lewes and many of the other study parishes is striking. In Newhaven in later years the proportion of those occupying properties worth over £10 was even lower than in Lewes. Uckfield also had a lower percentage of ratepayers in more valuable properties and, as noted in Chapter Three, Uckfield's economy was more akin to a town than a rural parish.

Williams found that when the number of ratepayers increased in Shefford to include more poorer parishioners there was an increase in those defaulting. There are references in the Sussex records to individuals being excused paying the poor rates.¹²⁰ Hindle has noted that in many areas there were substantial variations not only in the levels of pauperism but also in the ability to gather poor rates based largely on the character of the local economy. This is borne out in the study parishes where in downland communities fewer but wealthier residents paid the rates compared with wealden communities, while towns had the highest proportion of ratepayers and more people on lower incomes being rated. On the one hand this supports the argument that there were intra-regional differences in the supply of relief but the variations between town and rural economies also suggests that there may have been broader differences across regions.¹²¹

Turning now to the amount of money raised in the rates to be spent on poor relief, Figure 4.8 below shows the total to the nearest pound spent on disbursements each year between 1800 and 1835 in twelve of the study parishes with detailed overseers' accounts. When the parish clerks recorded expenditure in their accounts they referred to a number of items such as postage, travel by an overseer to a different parish, or maintenance of the workhouse, in addition to spending directly on the poor. These additional expenses tended to be similar across the parishes and should have a minimal effect when making comparisons.¹²² The results in the figure show quite a varied picture with some consistencies across most parishes such as

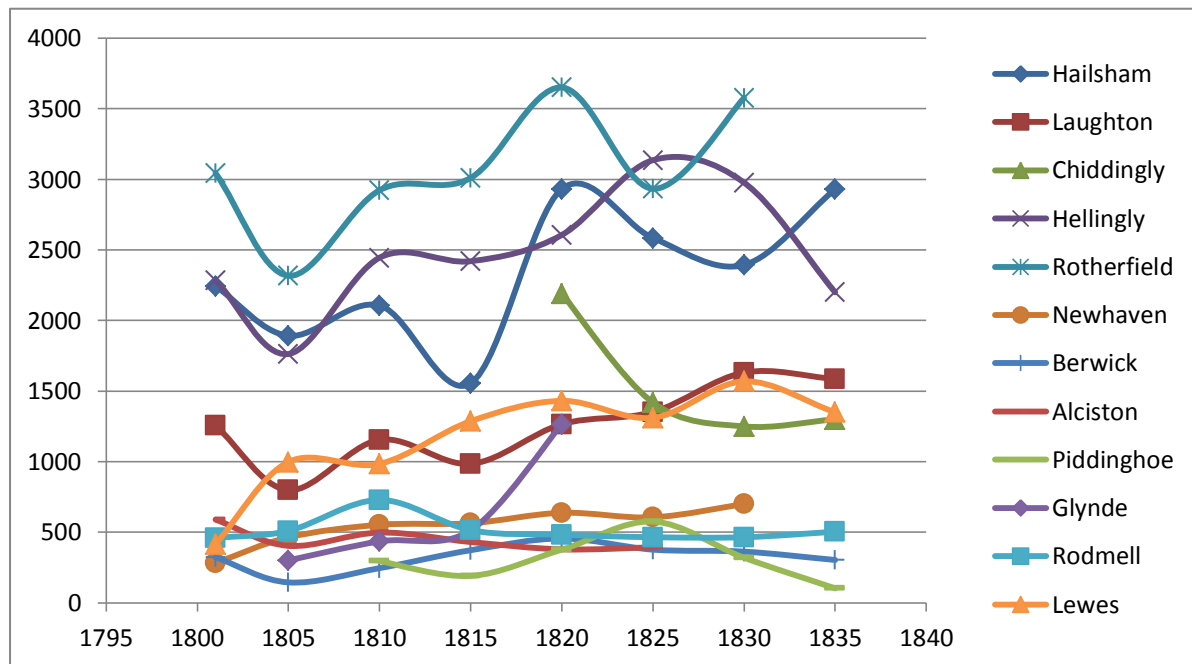
¹²⁰ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 76.

¹²¹ Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 376.

¹²² Most of the data in Figure 4.8 refers to disbursements. However, when these figures are not available the total amount raised in rates has been used as the two figures were invariably very similar, often within £10. Parish records have been used rather than returns to parliamentary enquiries as these figures varied. The clerks tended to record lower figures in the parliamentary returns, this may have been intentional or they may have missed out some of the payments which were not directly given to the poor.

high spending in 1801, a drop in spending in 1805, a peak in 1821 followed by a certain levelling off and in some cases a drop in spending.¹²³

Figure 4.8 Total spent on disbursements in pounds¹²⁴



However, the trends in Figure 4.8 do not match the trends in Figure 4.6 above which indicates a steady rise in relief numbers across the period in the majority of parishes. This is because the figures from the parish records in Figure 4.8 do not take into account any inflation. As noted earlier, studies of relief spending to date have not allowed for inflation or deflation between 1800 and 1835; yet, Steven King has highlighted that this is crucial. In Figure 4.9 below inflation has therefore been taken into account.¹²⁵ Two differences between figures 4.8 and 4.9 immediately stand out: in the second figure the value of relief spending drops and the trajectory of expenditure follows a steady upward direction in many of the parishes which fits more closely with the increase in numbers relieved. The relatively high numbers in Figure 4.8 for 1801, when bread was exceptionally expensive, appear as a low point for that year in Figure 4.9. Thus, the parish officials needed to raise more money to cover the high cost of basics.

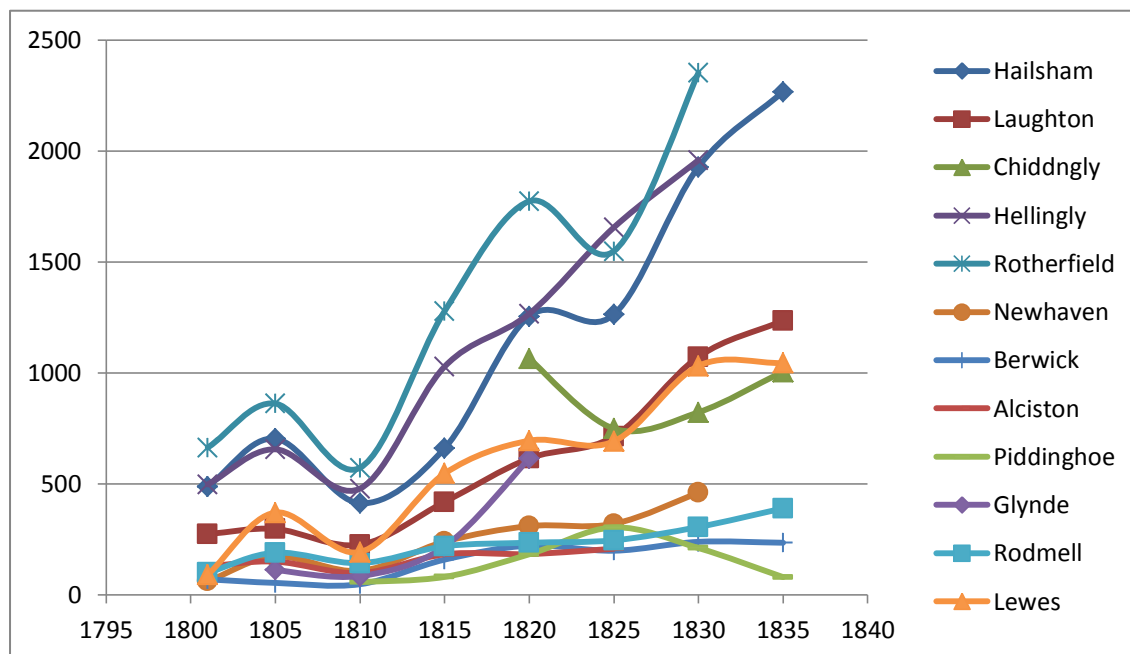
¹²³ Inflation was very high in 1801. Roger Wells referred to famine conditions for many people, notably agricultural workers, during the years 1799-1801: R. Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801* (London: 2011).

¹²⁴ Data in Figure 4.8 is taken from the overseers' accounts for each parish listed in the bibliography.

¹²⁵ Data in Figure 4.9 is based on Feinstein's inflation index: C. Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain during and after the Industrial Revolution', *The Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), 625-658. I am grateful to M. Fisher and S. King for supplying an adjusted version of the inflation index to account for the particularities of the poor.

When spending on the poor appears to increase it does not necessarily mean that the recipients received more relief.

Figure 4.9 Total spent on disbursements in pounds taking into account inflation over the period



One problem with the presentation of data in Figure 4.9 is that parishes with smaller populations and spending figures in the hundreds can appear distorted when compared with parishes with spending in the thousands. Therefore, separate figures for each parish are shown in Appendix 1 which compare expenditure with and without inflation. This makes it possible to look more closely at the profile of individual parishes to assess whether there were any intra-regional differences. It is apparent that the three wealden parishes of Hailsham, Rotherfield and Hellingly had the highest relief costs but they also had the largest populations other than Lewes which spent comparatively less money on poor relief when taking into consideration the population size. Trends in parish expenditure between 1800-1835 in the individual figures in Appendix 1 are quite similar during most of the period and do not suggest a notable difference between the Weald and the Downs with the one exception of Alciston where there was very little change between 1800 and 1835. Yet, there does appear to be an intra-regional difference at the end of the period as spending continued to increase up to 1835 in the wealden parishes whereas in the downland parishes and in Lewes this is less apparent. It is likely that the former found it more difficult to cut costs given the high numbers of unemployed/underemployed

labourers. As will be seen in the following chapter, the Poor Law Commissioners had plenty to say about high relief costs in certain parishes, notably in the Weald.

Decisions regarding the supply of relief were made by members of the parish vestry and this discussion will now consider the profile of local officials and vestry policies in the study parishes during the final decades of the OPL.¹²⁶ Parish officials included a churchwarden, a clerk who kept the parish records and overseer(s) who distributed relief to the poor. Those attending the vestry meetings were often, but not always, ratepayers. There were intra-regional differences between the Weald, the Downs and the town of Lewes, in the size and make-up of parish vestries and the background of officials. More people attended vestry meetings in the wealden parishes and in the town of Lewes, often between twenty and thirty people, not all of them ratepayers. The vestry clerk for Chiddingly noted in 1832 that the majority of the vestry, not just the overseers and churchwardens, made decisions regarding rates and relief.¹²⁷

Relief officials in these parishes could come from less well-off backgrounds; in Chiddingly, Uckfield and East Hoathly there are examples of overseers who lived in properties worth as little as 10s. or a few pounds. The larger wealden parishes sometimes had two or three overseers and office holders changed most years, although in Chiddingly and Laughton the post of assistant overseer was held by the same person for several years. Newhaven was another parish with a high number of vestry members, a regular change-over of office holders and less wealthy officials. In parishes with a more mixed economy such as Lewes, Newhaven, Hailsham and Uckfield officials included farmers and a number of tradesmen. At various times a silversmith, surveyor and wheelwright acted as overseer in Lewes. Yet, even in these parishes the major landowner or farming tenant tended to hold one of the offices of churchwarden or overseer. Thomas Tourle, a farmer who occupied the most valuable properties and was a major employer, was the churchwarden for St John Sub Castro in Lewes in most years between 1809 and 1824. Tourle became the first guardian for his parish when the Lewes NPL union was formed, thus maintaining a certain continuity following the introduction of the PLAA. Such individuals might fit the description of a 'principal inhabitant' or 'chief inhabitant'; terms dating from the seventeenth century. French has noted that these descriptions fitted leading residents

¹²⁶ Information on officials in the following discussion is taken from the vestry minutes, rate books and censuses for each parish, see bibliography.

¹²⁷ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834.

only within the geographical boundaries of their parish.¹²⁸ In the larger parishes these men worked alongside vestry members and officials below their social rank.¹²⁹

The situation was somewhat different in the rural downland parishes. Here the major landowning tenant farmers also acted on a regular basis as overseer or churchwarden and vestry member but they appeared to maintain almost total control of parish and relief administration as there were generally only five or six people in attendance at vestry meetings. There was a clear domination of some downland parishes by individual families who could aptly be described as 'chief inhabitants'. Members of the Stace family were churchwardens and overseers in most years in Berwick. In 1832 the overseer noted that the churchwardens and overseers pay more than eleven twelfths of the rates and therefore make the decisions about rate levels and spending.¹³⁰ In Alciston parish property was in the hands of three farmers who also made all the decisions regarding poor rates and relief. There was a similar situation in Rodmell which was dominated by the Saxby family while in Glynde one man, John Ellman a major tenant farmer, was effectively in charge of the vestry between 1801 and 1818. In these downland parishes there was little turn-over of office holders. Thomas Sokoll found that the vestry in Ardleigh, Essex, was dominated by prosperous tenant farmers who paid a large proportion of the rates, made decisions on spending relief and employed most of the parishioners.¹³¹

Although the overseers and churchwardens in several of the study parishes tended to be wealthier parishioners, the position of vestry clerk was often held by people of lower status. In some parishes it was a paid office occupied for a number of years by the same person. John Bartlett was vestry clerk for the Lewes parish from 1800 to 1824; he was then succeeded by Henry Bartlett who may have been a relative. In Chiddingly Richard Lower was clerk and assistant overseer from 1820 to the 1830s. Both the Bartletts and Lower were rate payers but in properties of low rental value below £5. The officials discussed above were all males but this was not always the case. In Chiddingly at least three overseers were women; one during the OPL period and two under the NPL. All three came from a relatively prosperous farming

¹²⁸ French, 'The Search for the "Middle Sort"', 286.

¹²⁹ French discussed the make-up of the vestry in Terling which was predominantly composed of tenant farmers: French, 'How dependent?', 197.

¹³⁰ *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners*, 1834.

¹³¹ Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices', 92.

background and were in their fifties or sixties. They employed servants including children from pauper families. These female overseers were probably the exception yet they are an important example of women taking on an official role several decades before the Local Government Act of 1894.¹³²

The predominance of one or two major tenant farmers as office holders was evident in some of the Sussex records by at least the start of the nineteenth century. The notion that wealthier, prominent individuals in the community should be in charge of parish relief systems was reinforced in the Sturges Bourne Acts of 1818 and 1819. The aim of this legislation was to tighten up relief regimes by enabling parishes to control vestry membership in a Select Vestry and appoint paid assistant overseers. These were contentious measures as they placed a restriction on which ratepayers were eligible to vote and only 'substantial householders or occupiers' were able to stand for election. When implemented, the Acts took control of relief policy away from less affluent members of the community. Table 4.8 below shows which of the study parishes opted to set up a Select Vestry and/or appoint an assistant overseer.

Take-up was apparently small; only three parishes have records that make direct reference to a Select Vestry and five to an assistant overseer. It is possible that the others adopted these measures without keeping a record, yet some reference would be expected. In fact small parishes such as Berwick or Rodmell would not have had the required minimum of five substantial householders. Replies to the 1832 enquiries also indicate a low take-up across Sussex and in other counties, although several parishes did not reply to the question about Select Vestries.¹³³ In Table 4.8 the parishes with a Select Vestry in the 1820s no longer had one by 1832 and only Hellingly indicated that one had recently been established in the early-1830s.

¹³² The identification of the three women in the parish records is based on the most likely match from information in the census and parish registers.

¹³³ S. Shave, 'The impact of Sturges Bourne's poor law reforms in rural England', *The Historical Journal*, 56 (2013), 407.

Table 4.8 Evidence of a Select Vestry and/or assistant overseer in the study parishes¹³⁴

	Reference to a Select Vestry (SV) or assistant overseer (AO) in parish records	No mention of a Select Vestry in parish records	1832 enquiries response to question: Is there a Select Vestry?	1832 enquiries reference to an assistant overseer
<u>Hailsham W</u>	SV, AO		No	Yes
<u>Laughton W</u>	AO			
<u>Chiddingly W</u>	AO		Parish	No
Hellingly W		x	Yes - this year	No
Uckfield W		x		
Rotherfield W		x	No	No
E. Hoathly W		x		
Waldron W		x	No	No
Newhaven D	SV		No	Yes 'the effect is good'
Rottingdean D		x	No	Yes 'to good effect'
Piddinghoe D		x		
Rodmell D		x		
Alciston D		x	No	No
Glynde D		x	No	No
Berwick D		x	No	No
Lewes	SV		No	No

To compare parish policies towards support of the poor in the final years of the OPL and to assess whether they led to a tightening up of poor relief, the Select Vestries of Hailsham, Lewes and Newhaven, which were set up between 1819 and 1826, are discussed. Shave found that responses in the 1832 enquiries indicated that relief expenses had been reduced when a Select Vestry was adopted.¹³⁵ French noted that in Terling, Essex, there was a reduction in the rates and in the number of relief recipients by the early-1830s following the appointment of an assistant overseer.¹³⁶ The approach of other study parishes will also be considered as it is possible that officials adopted a more austere regime without establishing a Select Vestry.

In Hailsham strict relief policies were in evidence several years before the Sturges Bourne Acts were passed. In fact, social relations between the poor and officials appear fractious in

¹³⁴ Information in Table 4.8 is taken from the *Report of His Majesty's commissioners, 1834* and vestry minutes, see bibliography.

¹³⁵ S. Shave, *Pauper policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester: 2017), 120.

¹³⁶ French, 'How Dependent?', 198.

Hailsham throughout the final years of the OPL where there was a fear of social unrest.¹³⁷ It was noted above that a relatively large workhouse was in operation and working conditions for male inmates could be harsh. In 1817 regulations were established regarding the working hours of outdoor labourers; there was to be a forfeit of 5s. for inhabitants who did not comply and half of the forfeiture would go to the 'informer'. By 1818 there is evidence that men who asked for more work or increased relief were only offered the workhouse. However, it wasn't until 1826 that a Select Vestry was set up in Hailsham and a permanent, paid overseer was appointed. Vestry members were expected to attend or pay a forfeit of 2s. 6d. Once the Select Vestry was established, there were ongoing efforts to regulate employment for able-bodied men including a billeting scheme in 1830. Punitive regulations continued to be enforced such as closing the tap rooms at inns at 10pm in 1827 and not offering work unless paupers attended church twice on a Sunday in 1828. However, it could be argued that rather than initiating a stricter relief regime, the setting up of a Select Vestry in Hailsham was part of a long-term policy to contain relief numbers and relief costs. Furthermore, spending on relief did not reduce following the establishment of the new vestry in 1826.¹³⁸

There is less evidence that the Lewes vestry felt the need to impose disciplinary measures prior to 1818, but there are indications dating from the early-1800s that officials were struggling to deal with escalating costs. In October 1801 when inflation was exceptionally high twenty-three households had their relief reduced and three were removed from the relief list altogether. Further cuts were made in April 1802 to the support given to thirty-one households. The cost of relief in Lewes continued to be an issue during the first two decades of the nineteenth century and in April 1819 a committee of vestry members gave a report in which they listed the actions they had taken to keep control of expenditure. These included chasing up those whose rate payments were in arrears and keeping a list of defaulters; monitoring spending on the poor house while at the same time maintaining the comfort of inhabitants; examining regular pay lists and making reductions when possible, and keeping a closer check on the earnings of individuals who requested occasional relief. This committee report was followed by the

¹³⁷ L. Salzman, *A History of Hailsham* (Lewes: 1901), 60.

¹³⁸ ESRO, Hailsham vestry minutes, 1815-1828, PAR 353/12/1/11-24.

decision to adopt a Select Vestry in May 1819; possibly the report was part of the preparation to go ahead with a new vestry.¹³⁹

The new Select Vestry consisted of twenty 'substantial householders'. A forfeit had to be paid for non-attendance, although this had been in force in Lewes as early as 1806. At the first meeting in July 1819 many of the actions in the committee report were reiterated. The vestry would investigate relief payments and all those on the weekly pay list would be temporarily struck off until they attended the next vestry meeting. Several people had their pension reduced and in 1820 six households were removed from the list. However, the number of people who had their rent paid seems to have remained the same. In 1822 a billeting system was set up and wages to paupers were regulated. In 1824 the vestry agreed that a single man who applied for work should have his board at the workhouse from 7am until 5pm. Two steel corn mills and a drying machine were purchased in 1825, possibly for the unemployed to work on at the workhouse during the day. There were one or two instances in the 1820s when indoor relief was offered to men when they had no work but references to this practice were not as common as in Hailsham. Spending on relief continued to rise during the 1820s, although given the population increase it could be seen as having been contained. It then plateaued by the early-1830s at which time the vestry decided to stop providing clothes and contributing to the pay of boys aged 16 and girls aged 15 who were boarded out. Also, by 1830 more relief was given in flour or in return for work rather than as cash and the total annual relief payments to some households went down.¹⁴⁰

Newhaven is the third parish with extant records referring to a Select Vestry. Minutes of a Select Vestry were kept from 1821 and in that year there are references to several stricter policies towards the poor. In September the vestry decreed that no rents were to be paid out of parish funds from the following Lady Day; innkeepers were to be given a list of relief recipients and would become liable if those paupers became intoxicated; all cash payments were to be replaced with flour and support would be withdrawn from those in arrears with their rent. In the following year two paupers had their allowances stopped because of irregularities regarding 'dancing' in the parish houses they occupied. However, the most

¹³⁹ ESRO, Lewes, vestry minutes, 1800-1820, PAR412/12/1-3.

¹⁴⁰ ESRO, Lewes vestry minutes, 1820-1828, PAR412/12/4-6; Lewes accounts of outdoor relief, 1830-1834, PAR412/31/3/3. Relief in the form of flour was one of the labourers' grievances during the resistance to the NPL in the south as they did not all have ovens. R. Wells, 'Resistance to the New Poor Law', 98.

significant measure that year was the decision to convert two parish houses into a small workhouse. In November rules and regulations for conducting and managing the 'poor house' were drawn up and were to be applied where possible to outdoor paupers too; they were similar to those drawn up for several Sussex workhouses under the NPL.¹⁴¹ The rules included attending church weekly and no consumption of spirits or strong beer. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the Newhaven minutes between 1809 and 1821 which makes it difficult to assess how much stricter relief policies were following the adoption of a Select Vestry. There is a reference in the 1809 minutes to the need for a house of industry for the 'better governance of the poor' which suggests that officials were concerned about pauper discipline prior to 1821. Expenditure on relief in Newhaven continued to rise during the 1820s indicating that the Select Vestry did not manage to cut costs, especially as the population actually dropped slightly between 1821 and 1831.¹⁴²

The significance of setting up a Select Vestry is brought into question by the fact that none of Hailsham, Lewes nor Newhaven still had one in operation by 1832, although Hailsham and Newhaven retained a paid overseer. Spending in the three parishes was not reduced but there was some levelling off in Lewes. Moreover, other parishes appeared to adopt a stricter relief regime without setting up a Select Vestry. As early as 1785 the Rottingdean vestry decided to withdraw all outdoor support to the twelve elderly poor who were the only people on the relief lists and offer the workhouse. Several opted to go without relief. In Berwick policies appear to have undergone a dramatic change at a much later time in the early-1830s. As noted above, outdoor relief payments were suddenly reduced in Berwick. In 1829 £300 was spent on disbursements but by 1834 the total was £80 which was partly spent on rent and wages; two overseers were employing young men to work on their farms and paying them from the parish funds. Overall spending on relief remained constant between the late-1820s and early-1830s as more money was spent on indoor relief. Bills relating to a workhouse appear in the accounts

¹⁴¹ ESRO, Newhaven minutes of the Select Vestry meetings, 1821-1823, P/426/1/3. Reference to rules for the NPL workhouse can be found in the correspondence between the guardians and the Poor Law Commissioners: The National Archives, (TNA) Newhaven union correspondence to the Central Authority of the Poor Law, 1835-42, MH 12/13046.

¹⁴² The Newhaven population was 927 in 1821 and 904 in 1831. However, there was a considerable rise in the town's population later in the century when a station was built. In 1861 the population was 1,886.

and Sargent Stace (possibly related to the overseer William Stace) received wages as a governor. The overseer reported in 1832 that a workhouse was in use.¹⁴³

Yet imposing a stricter welfare regime and cutting costs was only one of the aims of the Sturges Bourne Acts. A further purpose was to demonstrate the political influence within the parish of a select few. Arguably, whether or not policies changed was less important than the need to publicly reinforce a culture of surveillance from those with authority and focus on those who were 'deserving' based on character and conduct. For that reason the Sturges Bourne Acts have been viewed as having a considerable impact on the rural poor. Shave has suggested that the influence of the Acts was widely pervasive as other parishes adopted individual policies without setting up a Select Vestry. King argued that when both acts were implemented they had, 'potentially fundamental consequences for the experience of being poor.'¹⁴⁴

Wells has assessed the implementation of the Sturges Bourne Acts on other Sussex parishes. His review of Select Vestries in Ticehurst and Westbourne concluded that they made, 'a profound impression on the south-eastern countryside.' Ticehurst was a wealden parish with a high level of poverty. Policies established by the Select Vestry were similar to those in the study parishes including reviewing those on outdoor relief, setting up a billeting system and sending some children into the workhouse. Both Shave and Wells referred to the unpopularity of Select Vestries and assistant overseers amongst the poor. In Northiam, Sussex, labourers rioted at a Select Vestry meeting in 1822 while assistant overseers were either confronted by labourers or fled for safety during the Swing Riots. Although evidence from the study parishes suggests that policies and expenditure may not have been significantly altered by the Sturges Bourne Acts, the experience of the poor may well have been affected by the focus on their character and conduct and the restrictions imposed on certain behaviour or activities as noted above.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ ESRO, Rottingdean vestry minutes, 1710-1828, PAR466/12/1/2; Berwick overseers' accounts, 1683-1885, PAR/239/31; *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners*, 1834.

¹⁴⁴ Shave, 'The Impact'; King, *Poverty and welfare*, 26

¹⁴⁵ Shave, 'The Impact'; Wells, 'Poor Law Reform in the Rural South-East'; Wells, 'Resistance to the New Poor Law', 89.

Table 4.9 Summary of replies to three questions in the 1832 Enquiries

Parish	Official	Question 26 Is any and what attention paid to the Character of the Applicant, or to the Causes of his Distress?	Question 37 Is the industry of the labourers in your neighbourhood supposed to be increasing or diminishing, that is, are your labourers supposed to be better or worse workmen than they formerly were?	Question 53 Can you give the Commissioners any information respecting the causes and consequences of the Agricultural Riots and Burning of 1830 and 1831?
Hailsham W	Edwin Elmes Assistant Overseer	No	Worse workmen than formerly, for want of regular employment, and their attendance at the beer shops	The use of machinery in general
Chiddingly W	Richard Lower Vestry Clerk	Very little or none	Diminishing. In the older Labourers little or no difference is known	No riots in this parish, elsewhere paupers kept in idleness at 5s. per week
Hellingly W	William Weller John Parris Overseers	Very little, the drunken and careless have sometimes the greatest relief	Diminishing, and the workmen not so good	Unemployment, unequal and low wages to married and single men
Rotherfield W		-	-	-
Waldron W		Character always taken into consideration, when illness does not prevail	-	-
Newhaven D		Yes	Diminishing	No
Rottingdean D		Very minute attention is paid in the Vestry, more so than when the case is brought before the Magistrates	The industry of some of the Labourers is not diminished, but young and single men more idle due to the beershops	No riots in this neighbourhood. Beershops responsible for riots elsewhere
Glynde D	John Ellman Churchwarden and Overseer	Yes	Certainly industry and good conduct very much diminishes since the establishment of Beer-shops	Unemployment. Farmers parleyed with the mob, they were threatened if they did not increase wages
Berwick D	William Stace Overseer	-	-	-
Alciston D	Henry Ridge, Overseer	-	-	-
Lewes	William Cooper Henry Bartlett overseers	Yes, most certainly; but not to its full extent	Decidedly worse	Political lectures and beershops have contributed greatly to them

Legislation in 1818/19 was a response to concern over escalating relief costs and the threat of rural disturbances. These concerns were even greater by 1832 when the government sent out questionnaires to parishes as part of a review of the poor law. Some sense of the thoughts of

local officials regarding the poor may be gleaned from their responses to the 1832 enquiries. Table 4.9 above shows answers from the study parishes to those questions in the enquiries which reveal some information about how officials viewed the poor.¹⁴⁶ The replies to question 26 imply that officials in the downland parishes tended to pay more attention to the character of relief applicants than the wealden parishes. This may well have been a matter of pragmatism in the larger parishes where many more people applied for relief. However, as will be seen in the following chapters, there is further evidence that officials adopted a strict approach towards vetting applicants under the NPL in some of the downland parishes.

Replies to question 37 are more consistent and suggest that officials were worried about the behaviour of younger labourers. It is possible that this reflects the concern felt by farmers in the rural southeast that social unrest might continue following the Swing Riots. Answers to question 53 reveal a range of responses and reflect localised concerns. For example, the Lewes overseer referred to political meetings in the town, and John Ellman in Glynde expressed strong opinions regarding the actions of neighbouring parish officials.¹⁴⁷ The replies from Hellingly and Hailsham show some awareness of the issues which concerned the rioters. Responses from Sussex parishes not included in this study also covered a range of issues: several blamed labourers from other counties; at least nine parishes referred to beershops; low wages and unemployment and the payment of tithes were a common concern. Cobbett was blamed by one parish and the French Revolution by another.¹⁴⁸

Responses to the government enquiries seemed to combine awareness of the difficulties faced by labourers with an expectation that they should conform to certain standards of behaviour. This viewpoint appears to have been held by officials from a range of backgrounds and in both the wealden and downland parishes. In the final part of this section case studies of officials and of individuals who held considerable influence within their locality are considered in order to further explore their attitude towards the poor. The first case study is of a man who supported the notion that those in authority should extend a paternalistic care for their parishioners on the understanding that they were industrious and hard working. John Ellman of Glynde was an

¹⁴⁶ The enquiries included questions to rural and town parishes. The study parishes responded to the rural questions; Lewes responded to both rural and town questions.

¹⁴⁷ Cobbett spoke in Lewes in 1822 in support of small scale farmers and angered large scale farmers including John Ellman: P. Brandon, *The South Downs* (London: 1998), 103.

¹⁴⁸ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834.

overseer and a farmer of some distinction having improved the breeding of Southdown Sheep. A short biography was written about him by a contemporary, F. Walesby, a barrister and JP, which includes his views on the poor. Ellman took over the tenancy of the main farm in Glynde from his father (who was also an overseer) in 1788. He showed a close interest in parish labourers, maintaining a local school and providing schooling to adults in his kitchen. He encouraged a shepherd, John Payne, to learn to read and then employed him as a schoolmaster. However, he was also a strict disciplinarian and forbade the use of public houses in Glynde, instead encouraging families to drink beer at home.

Ellman's views on supporting the poor were expressed in his correspondence with Arthur Young. He stated that the poor in his parish were 'comfortable' during the economic crisis of 1795 due partly to charitable assistance which may well have come from his own pocket as he regularly referred to 'my sundries' as part of the disbursements in his overseer's accounts. However, he criticised guardians from other parishes who did not encourage the poor to be industrious and he opposed the poor laws for the same reason. Ellman was in favour of enclosure as it enabled the most successful farmers to work the land and he was against the allotment movement as labourers should always be available to assist the farmers. Nevertheless, he ensured that his employees were given grassland for a cow and pig and arable to grow vegetables when they married. Walesby concluded that Ellman was a charitable man who rewarded industry and punished idleness.¹⁴⁹

The Earl of Chichester could also be described as adopting a paternalistic concern for agricultural labourers, although his views seem more sympathetic to the desire of labourers to be independent than Ellman. The Earl lived in the parish of Stanmer on the Downs and became chairman of the Newhaven Board of Guardians in 1836. He owned land in several of the study parishes and held a meeting in Laughton in 1830 with the overseer to consider how to deal with high unemployment amongst the labourers in that parish. While he was not a relief official under the OPL, he clearly held influence in the county. In January 1833 he sent a letter to the Poor Law Commissioners giving his views on the relief system. He expressed sympathy for agricultural labourers who were at the mercy of a labour market where supply exceeded demand; however, he supported the Malthusian proposition that the relief system encouraged

¹⁴⁹ ESRO, F. Walesby, *Memoir of Mr. Ellman* (Lewes: 1847). Care is needed when discussing this memoir as the author expressed his own strong views, notably on the 'pernicious practice of paying labourers from the rates'.

early marriage and an increase in population. His solution was to offer the unemployed the option of emigration rather than the workhouse which was expensive and demoralising for the poor. Unlike Ellman, the Earl also favoured allotments particularly for those who had another trade or craft, such as thatchers, which could not support them for the whole year. In his letter to the Commissioners the Earl referred to conversations that he had with labourers in Sussex and noted that they shared his view that the present system is unsustainable.¹⁵⁰

Ellman and the Earl of Chichester were men with some considerable status (although Ellman was a tenant farmer he held property worth approximately £400). Both used the role of parish official to exert authority in their community. However, it could also be argued that they had a sense of civic duty and felt responsible not only for maintaining order but also for keeping control of spending while at the same time supporting those less well off in their parish. In the following two chapters the connection between acting as a relief official and carrying out civic duty will be further explored, notably once the role of the NPL guardians broadened. Arguably, other OPL officials who came from more humble backgrounds also demonstrated a sense of civic duty. Richard Lower is a good example of an official who spent many years in a range of offices but in a parish with a large vestry where he probably had less influence. Lower was a schoolmaster for thirty-nine years in Chiddingly. His official roles between 1808 and 1835 included Headborough, Tax Collector, assistant overseer and vestry clerk. His long-term service to the parish warranted a short biographical memorandum at the end of the vestry book. Lower was the author of the replies from Chiddingly to the 1832 enquiries although it is not clear whether or not he was expressing his private views. His answers implied opposition to the poor laws which were responsible for the diminished state of the labourer, and criticism of other local parishes which paid a labour rate to the poor.¹⁵¹

Recollections of the Reverend Edward Ellman from Berwick (quite possibly a relation to John Ellman) are a further reminder that each official was an individual. Reverend Ellman refers to the eccentricities of William Stace, the churchwarden and overseer at Berwick. As mentioned above, the Stace family controlled much of the relief policy in that parish. William Stace was a

¹⁵⁰ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834. The paternalistic approach towards the poor shown by men such as Ellman and the Earl of Chichester was exemplified by the Earl of Egremont in Petworth who provided employment schemes, reduced rents and financed emigration for labourers: S. Thomas, 'Power, paternalism, patronage and philanthropy: the Wyndhams and the New Poor Law in Petworth', *Local Historian*, 32 (2002), 99-117.

¹⁵¹ ESRO, Chiddingly vestry minutes, 1831-1862, PAR/292/12.

tenant farmer with a very similar sized land holding to John Ellman. He is described as a character that was fond of wild schemes including the invention of a windmill that could be used for ploughing. In 1840 Stace emigrated to America with his family demonstrating that this was not only an option for labourers.¹⁵² The diaries of Thomas Turner, an overseer from the wealden parish of East Hoathly, also indicate that vestry officials represented a range of characters and backgrounds. Writing during the eighteenth-century Turner referred to the 'quarrelsome' members of the vestry including Mr French whose oaths often deafened the vestry meeting. Hindle also noted that vestry meetings could be, 'occasions of faction and tumult'. However, it is hard to imagine such conduct in a vestry managed by John Ellman. It is quite possible that there was a considerable difference between meetings in the small downland vestries and those in the larger wealden vestries.¹⁵³

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the scale, nature, duration, cost and sentiment of poor relief in Sussex parishes during the crisis years of the OPL so that comparisons can be made with relief under the NPL. The aim was also to identify any intra-regional variations in the provision of relief and to make comparisons with other studies to assess whether any differences in relief reflect a broad regional dimension, as suggested by King, or very localised patterns discussed by Hindle. The chapter also asks questions that have not been addressed in the historiography, notably regarding the supply of relief, and is unusual in using case studies to address these issues.

In the first section which considered the number and profile of relief recipients the data clearly shows a marked intra-regional difference in the high proportion of parishioners supported in the wealden parishes compared with either the downland parishes and port of Newhaven or the town of Lewes. The figures could vary by as much as forty-seven per cent between parishes.¹⁵⁴ The findings support Langton's work as the size of the parish, the geographical location and related economy were important factors in determining the scale of relief. Levels of relief were higher in the Sussex parishes with an economy based predominantly on

¹⁵² Rev. E. Ellman, *Recollections of a Sussex Parson* (Derbyshire: 2004); the plough was attached to a rope on the sails of the windmill but unfortunately the experiment was not a success.

¹⁵³ T. Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765* (David Vaisey ed.), (Oxford: 1984), 148; Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 365.

¹⁵⁴ For example, up to forty-seven per cent more parishioners were supported in Laughton than in Newhaven in 1821.

agriculture, but this was not the only consideration as both wealden and downland economies relied on farming. As noted in Chapter Three, the wealden parishes were more dispersed with larger populations than on the Downs. There were many small farms which struggled to sustain work during periods of economic hardship resulting in higher levels of unemployment and underemployment.

When assessing changes in relief numbers over time, the Sussex parishes were similar to those in other south-eastern and Midlands counties where increased pressure on the relief system was apparent by the final decades of the eighteenth century and where there were peaks in relief levels, notably in 1801 when inflation soared. However, other studies have not identified such a clear upward trajectory in relief numbers which was apparent in the wealden parishes throughout the final decades of the OPL. Moreover, intra-regional differences meant that in some of the downland parishes numbers were more static.

Findings from this Sussex study potentially support the views of both Hindle and King. There were clear intra-regional differences and varying approaches towards escalating relief numbers in adjacent parishes. In several, but not all, of the wealden parishes able-bodied labourers and their families were placed on the weekly or regular relief lists; this has not been noted in other studies. It suggests an element of pragmatism and acceptance on the part of officials where poverty and unemployment were rife. Not all parishes conformed to type as Berwick at the foot of the Downs had a relief profile more akin to parishes in the Weald. While there were intra-regional differences, several parishes had similar relief profiles to those from other counties in the southeast and Midlands. The town economy of Lewes shared characteristics with towns in Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire. The profile of relief recipients in some of the wealden parishes matched that of Terling in Essex. Moreover, the range in relief numbers across the Sussex parishes was similar to Oxfordshire. This supports King's proposal that relief systems shared characteristics within macro-regions and it is possible to place parishes such as Laughton or Hailsham in the Weald within the same 'welfare regime model', that of an Entitling Regime, to parishes such as Terling in Essex.¹⁵⁵

In the second section covering the nature and character of relief the focus was on the range and type of support available to parishioners in the study parishes and whether by the early-

¹⁵⁵ King, 'Welfare Regimes', 42-66.

nineteenth century poor relief was generous and flexible as Sokoll and King have suggested or whether a harsher system was in evidence as proposed by Hollen Lees. The range and amount of relief, notably cash pensions, appears to have been very similar not only in eastern Sussex, but in parishes from other studies of the southeast and the Midlands. This indicates a shared awareness amongst local officials of a standard level of provision for the poor. The main intra-regional difference within Sussex concerned indoor support as not all the study parishes had a workhouse. Larger parishes tended to offer indoor relief which meant that it was more prevalent in the Weald and in Lewes. A wide range of workhouse provision is apparent in many other counties with the size of the parish being a determining factor.

There is evidence that workhouse conditions could be strict, notably in Hailsham and Lewes, and officials in some parishes were using these establishments as a deterrent. However, there is also evidence that officials adopted a humane and sometimes generous approach towards the parish poor. Hurren and King have found that overseers did not stint when funding funerals and this is supported by the Sussex evidence. Relief officials paid for schooling and provided children with employment in their own homes. There is evidence of a harsher regime during the final decade of the OPL when some officials decided to replace cash pensions with a flour allowance which was unpopular amongst labourers, and men were set to work, although this could be mitigated when overseers opted to make up wages. These changes in relief provision demonstrate that there was flexibility in the system. This was also apparent in the case studies which include details on individual spending regimes for each relief recipient; information that has not been examined by other studies. However, flexibility could lead to uncertainty and this was apparent in the case studies where relief could be erratic and likely to make household budgeting very difficult. This was a negative aspect of poor relief that has received little attention yet it was probably universal and applied during most periods.

In the final section it was possible to develop both the debate regarding intra-regional variations and also the question of whether relief was humane or harsh by looking more closely at those who supplied relief; the ratepayers and officials. The number and profile of ratepayers and the amount spent on relief in the study parishes mirrored intra-regional variations regarding the number of relief recipients as there were more ratepayers from less wealthy backgrounds paying for higher relief costs in the Weald than on the Downs. However, an even greater discrepancy occurred between town and rural economies supporting other studies and

indicating that this may well have crossed regional boundaries. The leniency or harshness of relief regimes in the study parishes was assessed by analysing the adoption of Select Vestries, checking whether relief spending had risen or fallen by the end of the OPL and considering how relief officials viewed the poor. As noted above, there is evidence of a stricter regime in many parishes across the study region as relief numbers grew and unemployment became an increasing problem. Select Vestries played a part in tightening relief provision but only temporarily in a few parishes and they were arguably part of an ongoing regime of controlling spiralling costs.

One of the aims of establishing Select Vestries was to enable the most influential, wealthy inhabitants to exert their authority in the parish. In fact in Sussex this was happening before the Sturges Bourne Acts of 1818 and 1819. The personality of individuals mattered as men such as John Ellman had the power to impose their views onto the relief system. However, this study agrees with Sokoll and King that there is plenty of evidence that officials wanted to support their parishioners. A general lessening of regard for the poor as proposed by Hollen Lees is not apparent in the Sussex parishes. At the same time, one significant finding from this research is that overseers became more aware of a divide between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. By the final decades of the OPL the profile of the 'deserving' poor had changed to include able-bodied men and while officials seem to have accepted this, they reserved their sympathy for those who were hard working and industrious. It is possible that this was more apparent in the smaller parishes where overseers had a more intimate knowledge of parishioners.

The combination of continued unemployment, finite resources and resentment towards policies which questioned the character and conduct of the poor led to a worsening of relations between labourers and officials by the early-1830s as noted by Jones, Wells and Griffin. This general deterioration in the relationship between those providing relief and those in receipt of relief was a regional sentiment as evidence from the Swing Riots demonstrates. The introduction of the NPL in the mid-1830s thus came at a crucial time when relief numbers and costs were continuing to rise in some parishes, notably in the Weald in Sussex, and many were questioning the validity of support for the parish poor. It was also a time when ratepayers and employers were concerned by rural unrest and the relationship between labourers and farmers was potentially undergoing a change in sentiment. In the next chapter communication between local officials and the Poor Law Commissioners is examined in the study parishes as they were

grouped into the NPL unions. It is important to assess how that grouping impacted on individual parishes which may have been connected with much higher or lower spending parishes; an issue that has not been addressed in the historiography. Questions are asked regarding intra-regional variations between unions based in the Weald, on the Downs and in Lewes. How did guardians respond to the changes that the Commissioners wished to impose on their local relief regimes? Were relief numbers and costs reduced, and did the experience of the poor change during those initial years under the NPL?

Chapter Five

The introduction of the New Poor Law in eastern Sussex.

Introduction

Following on from the assessment of poor relief in eastern Sussex during the final decades of the OPL in Chapter Four, the discussion now considers what impact the NPL had on both relief recipients and relief officials in the study parishes. Concerns noted in previous chapters regarding the cost and extent of poor law provision by the 1830s and social unrest evident in the Swing Riots, led to the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1832 to investigate the state of the poor law. The culmination of the Commission's work was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. As already noted, one of the aims of the new legislation was to reduce relief numbers and relief spending by deterring people, notably able-bodied male labourers, from applying to the parish for support. It was intended by the Commissioners who framed the law that the only option for support of the able-bodied would be in a well-regulated workhouse. The Commissioners also wished to obtain greater uniformity across the country in the provision of relief by combining parishes into unions run by boards of elected guardians and establishing a central board to regulate local practice.¹

David Englander has described the NPL as, 'the single most important piece of social legislation ever enacted'.² However, there is considerable debate within the historiography regarding the extent of change in relief practice following 1834. This is partly because the new legislation was implemented at different times and to varying degrees regionally. It has been argued throughout this study that the primary focus of the Poor Law Commissioners was south-eastern rural communities such as eastern Sussex. As noted in Chapter Two, regional studies have found that in areas such as the north-west and Wales local officials did not feel that changes in relief policy were necessary or relevant to their communities. Thus, the implementation of the NPL varied across the country and often involved protracted negotiation between local and central officials. There are still many gaps to be filled in regional NPL research, Sussex being a

¹ S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law Policy* (London: 1910: reprint, 1963), 2-4. However, the aims of the NPL have been disputed amongst historians, notably the ending of outdoor relief payments, (see discussion below).

² D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Britain, 1834-1914* (London: 1998), 1.

notable example, and barely any work has been carried out intra-regionally.³ The NPL section of this study has been divided into two chapters so that due attention can be given to the crucial introductory phase; this chapter focuses on the early NPL years, 1834-1839, while Chapter Six discusses the years 1840-1860. When comparing Sussex with other regions, the focus continues to be on other south-eastern and Midland counties.

Of the many themes that could be covered in a chapter on so broad an issue four are particularly pertinent to this study: whether the local relief officials in the new unions were receptive to or opposed the Commissioners' regulations and the subsequent impact this had on their relationship with the poor; whether any form of outdoor relief continued, notably for able-bodied labourers; what use was made of a deterrent workhouse, and whether expenditure on relief was cut. Linked to all of these questions is the issue of local autonomy versus central control which will be considered throughout the two NPL chapters. It is also essential to continue to compare relief practices intra-regionally and temporally in order to address a key theme underlying this study: to what extent the NPL changed the work of relief officials and the experience of relief recipients. Given the regional variations in the implementation of the PLAA noted above, it is essential to position the eastern Sussex parishes within the broader historiography. Therefore a brief recap is needed of the treatment of these four themes in other studies.

Turning first to the approach of local officials to the PLAA, there is general consensus that most unions within the southeast and the Midlands, where relief spending had escalated under the OPL, adopted the new regulations far more readily than other areas of England and Wales. Anthony Brundage and Elizabeth Hurren's studies of unions in Northamptonshire found that boards of guardians were dominated by landowners who supported the new regulations and maintained control over the local relief system. Hurren's work on the Brixworth union demonstrated that landowner control was maintained over several decades. Samantha Williams' and William Apfel and Peter Dunkley's studies of Bedfordshire note that boards of guardians comprised of wealthier tenant farmers adopted a strict approach although Anne Digby has argued that in eastern counties tenant farmers tended to replace landowners and a

³ Talbot has carried out a study of two unions in the Staffordshire Potteries, albeit at a later date between 1871 and 1901, and identified intra-regional variations in the approach of officials towards the care of children, the treatment of the elderly and support for vagrants: R. Talbot, 'North South Divide of the Poor in the Staffordshire Potteries, 1871-1901' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Leicester University, 2016).

more relaxed system ensued once the new legislation was established.⁴ However, as this study will show, while members of the aristocracy on some of the boards of guardians may have supported aspects of the NPL, they were not necessarily willing to relinquish local control of relief. The composition of the new boards is a crucial consideration in this chapter.

In terms of the relationship between officials and the poor, Steven King drew attention to the importance of the 'sentiment of relief giving' in his study *Poverty and welfare in England* and more recent work has begun to focus on possible changes in the sentiment behind relief following the PLAA. Peter Jones and Natalie Carter have questioned whether the Commissioners' intention to rationalise entitlement and standardise welfare practice succeeded in eroding the sympathy and mutuality of the more familiar relationships under the OPL. They argue that there was potentially a less sympathetic understanding between the poor and the Commissioners than there had been between the poor and local overseers but that further study into the rhetoric of local negotiations under the NPL is needed.⁵ The sentiment behind relief giving was discussed in the previous chapter and the evidence suggested that officials in the eastern Sussex parishes wanted to support their local poor even in the final decades of the OPL when there was increased pressure on the system. The importance of individual personalities in determining the nature of local relief was noted under the OPL and it continued to be a vital factor under the NPL. As will be seen in the discussion below, parishes did not disappear as a component of relief; vestries and overseers continued to play a role and individual guardians provided a link between parishes and the union.

The second theme in this chapter is the attempt by the Commissioners to end outdoor relief payments to able-bodied labourers. This is an issue which has led to considerable debate in the historiography as discussed in Chapter Two. Digby and Michael Rose have argued that allowances either for medical reasons or to supplement irregular earnings continued under the NPL due to loopholes in the legislation. However, Karel Williams contends that the

⁴ A. Brundage, 'The English Poor Law of 1834 and the Cohesion of Agricultural Society', *Agricultural History*, 48 (1974), 405-417; E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism* (Suffolk: 2007); S. Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief and the Economy of Makeshifts: Bedfordshire in the Early Years of the New Poor Law', *Rural History*, 16 (2005), 21-52; W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Laws: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), 37-68; A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: 1976).

⁵ S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000), 237; P. Jones and N. Carter, 'Writing for redress: redrawing the epistolary relationship under the New Poor Law', *Continuity and Change*, 34 (2019), 380, 394.

Commissioners were successful in severely reducing outdoor relief to able-bodied men and the studies in Northamptonshire and Bedford mentioned above also found that outdoor relief to able-bodied men was quickly, if not sustainably, curtailed.⁶ The provision of outdoor relief to labourers was one aspect of relief that resulted in considerable intra-regional variation in the Sussex parishes studied here under the OPL. There were higher numbers of outdoor relief recipients in the wealden parishes compared with the downland parishes and the town of Lewes, and more labouring families being supported in the Weald. Given these differences, this study can make an important contribution to the debate over the impact of the PLAA as it could reveal intra-regional differences in this impact.

With regard to the provision of indoor relief, the third theme of this chapter, there is little dispute that under both the Old and New Poor Laws there were major regional differences in indoor provision, despite the call for greater uniformity in the PLAA. Following 1834, many south-eastern unions had developed or built a workhouse within two or three years while in parts of Wales and Lancashire they were not provided until the 1870s.⁷ One aim of the PLAA was that indoor relief should be a deterrent, yet as Jones and King have pointed out, deterrent workhouses were in existence well before 1834, notably in urban areas. Indeed, the Poor Law Commissioners had referred to unfavourable reports of workhouses, notably in towns, under the OPL.⁸ Recent studies have argued that the experience of the indoor poor was wide-ranging and this needs to be taken into account when discussing indoor relief under the NPL.⁹

The final theme in this chapter is expenditure on poor relief and whether this was reduced as intended by the Commissioners. Most studies to date indicate that there was a considerable

⁶ Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law'; M. Rose, 'The Allowance System under the New Poor Law,' *Economic History Review*, 19 (1966), 607-620; K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: 1981); Brundage, 'The English Poor Law'; Hurren, *Protesting*; Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief'; Apfel and Dunkley, 'English Rural Society'.

⁷ The union of Rhayader in Mid-Wales and the union of Todmorden in Lancashire did not build a workhouse until 1877: Evans and Jones, "'A Stubborn Intractable Body.'"

⁸ P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England, bearing Witness* (Macmillan: 2020), 5; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws*, PP 1834, C.44.

⁹ Studies include P. Jones, S. King, and K. Thompson, 'Clothing the New Poor Law Workhouse in the Nineteenth Century', *Rural History*, 32 (2021), 127-148; A. Tomkins, 'Poor Law Institutions through Working-Class Eyes: Autobiography, Emotion, and Family Context, 1834-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 60 (2021), 285-309.

cut in the costs of relief after 1834 to the benefit of the ratepayers.¹⁰ Between 1834 and 1840 expenditure on relief nationally dropped from £6.3 million to £4.5 million despite a rise in population.¹¹ However, King argues there were already signs of a reduction in relief spending prior to 1834 which related to improvements in the cost of living. He has also suggested that while there was a temporary tightening of relief practice in the first years of the NPL reflecting an initial flush of enthusiasm, this was not sustained in the following decades.¹² This is why it is important to compare the 1830s with the following two decades. It was demonstrated in Chapter Four that relief practice changed over time in the final decades of the OPL and this was almost certainly the case under the NPL.¹³

The structure of this chapter follows a chronological order starting with the implementation of the PLAA and the personnel involved: the Poor Law Commissioners and the Assistant Commissioners. The degree of local resistance to the new legislation is analysed based on correspondence between Commissioners and guardians and newspaper reports.¹⁴ The setting up of the unions and the new boards of guardians is considered, notably whether there was continuity in personnel between the Old and New Poor Laws. The discussion then looks at the work of the unions during the later 1830s and the guardians' views on, and any opposition to, the multiple directives from the Poor Law Commission. It was noted in the OPL chapter above that officials demonstrated flexibility; this would have been tested by the new regulations. The approach of each union towards providing outdoor relief payments, notably to able-bodied labourers, is discussed and the number of people in receipt of outdoor relief under the NPL is compared with the numbers prior to 1834. The deterrent nature of the union workhouses is

¹⁰ Studies include: Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief'; Apfel and Dunkley, 'English Rural Society'; Brundage, 'The English Poor Law'; Hurren, *Protesting*; King, *Poverty and welfare*.

¹¹ A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: 1999), 10, 168.

¹² King has suggested that in some parishes relief policy may initially have been stricter as officials were learning to manage a revised system but this was followed by a more relaxed approach. As the new guardians gained a better understanding of the legislation they tended to revert to customary practice where possible: S. King, 'Rights, Duties and Practice between the Old and New Poor Laws' in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle upon Tyne: 2015).

¹³ Hurren's study of the Brixworth Union suggested that it was not until the 1860s when real changes in relief practice occurred: Hurren, *Protesting*.

¹⁴ Eastwood highlights the important role that newspapers, in particular the growing number of local publications, played in informing communities by the late-eighteenth century: D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700-1870* (New York: 1997), 74. Jones and King noted that as taxes were removed in the 1830s the press enabled a wider spectrum of society to express their opinions during the course of the nineteenth century, Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 15.

questioned and the number and profile of the indoor poor before and after the new legislation is analysed. An assessment of relief expenditure for the parishes joining the eastern Sussex unions is carried out to establish whether costs were cut. In the previous chapter case studies of individuals receiving relief under the OPL were presented, and similar case studies for relief recipients under the NPL are included at the end of this chapter.

The New Poor Law in 1834

As noted in Chapter Three, there had been several attempts by government to review the poor law in the early-nineteenth century. However, it was not until 1834 that significant changes to the legislation were achieved. The Royal Commission of 1832 consisted of nine Commissioners. They obtained information on local relief practices by asking local officials, overseers and churchwardens, to complete questionnaires. There is little doubt both amongst some contemporaries and within the historiography that members of the Commission, notably Nassau Senior and Edwin Chadwick, had a specific agenda. They wanted to abolish the payment of allowances to the able-bodied, notably allowances which supplemented wages, and in effect protect a free labour market. Thus, the wording of some of the questions was ambiguous and much of the evidence relied on anecdotal material.¹⁵

Key remedial measures proposed by the Commissioners in their report of 1834 included ceasing all outdoor relief to the able-bodied, with the exception of apprenticeships. The only option of relief for the able-bodied and their families was admission to a well-regulated workhouse. However, the Commissioners acknowledged that there may be cases of extreme necessity where medical attendance might be required. They also noted that outdoor support for the aged and impotent had been less subject to abuse implying that this might continue. Parishes were to be grouped into unions as the Commissioners felt that government by a public body would be preferable to administration by individual overseers who were often ill-equipped for office and subject to corruption. Uniformity should be established through regulations issued by a centralised authority and interlocking systems of inspection and audit

¹⁵ John Walter, the editor of *The Times*, referred to questions which were designed to draw out answers that corresponded with the pre-conceived notions of the Commissioners: A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Hampshire: 2002), 65; Verdon and Driver suggested that the report produced the results desired by the Commissioners: N. Verdon, 'The Rural Labour Market in the Early Nineteenth Century: Women and Children's Employment, Family Income, and the 1834 Poor Law Report', *Economic History Review*, 55 (2002), 303; F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The workhouse System* (Cambridge: 1993), 24.

by central government. In addition to able-bodied labourers, women with bastard children were singled out for criticism in the report and it was proposed that the mother rather than the father should be responsible for supporting the child.¹⁶

There was little opposition to the Commissioners' proposals when the poor law bill was introduced in the House of Commons, although there were challenges to the suggestion that bastard children should be the sole responsibility of the mother. The bill was passed by 319 votes to twenty. When the bill proceeded to the House of Lords the bastardy clauses were amended; however, fathers were only to be held responsible until the child was seven years old. A further important modification to the bill was initiated by the Marquis of Salisbury who argued that the clause 'ending all out-relief by next summer' should be dropped. Significantly, this meant that the eradication of outdoor relief became piecemeal and resulted in marked regional variations in the progress of this endeavour. The PLAA was enacted on the 14th August 1834 and a Royal Commission was established to implement the new legislation. Three Commissioners were appointed: Thomas Frankland Lewes, George Nicholls and J.G. Shaw Lefevre; while Chadwick was given the position of secretary to the Commission. Assistant Commissioners were appointed to liaise with local officials and make every effort to impose a more uniform practice across the country. The background of the Assistant Commissioners was varied; they included country gentlemen with extensive property, barristers and ex-military men. David Roberts points out that it was rare for such able men to do the 'drudgery of mere itinerant officials' but they were driven by a reforming zeal and a belief in the importance of supporting the 'independent labourer' and a free market.¹⁷

The Poor Law Commissioners for eastern Sussex in this period were W. Hawley, who set up the new unions, Edward Tufnell, who replaced Hawley in July 1836, and Henry Parker who became Assistant Commissioner for the area in 1842. Hawley was a country gentleman and magistrate from Hampshire with a military background. He was an ardent supporter of the NPL and of Chadwick and had helped to draft the NPL report. Tufnell was also a friend of Chadwick. He was a barrister and a member of the gentry, son-in-law to an earl. He shared an interest in pauper education and worked alongside James Kay to develop schooling in workhouses. Parker had

¹⁶ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834. Crowther noted that in practice workhouse populations under the NPL came to disproportionately focus on the 'deserving poor', notably the aged, infirm and children: Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 73.

¹⁷ D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the Welfare State* (Yale: 1969), 162.

been an Assistant Secretary to the Poor Law Commissioners prior to his appointment as Assistant Commissioner in 1839. He was unfortunate in working as an Assistant Commissioner in the 1840s when the number of assistants was reduced from twenty-one to nine and each man had up to seventy-one unions to visit. Parker was responsible for the Andover union and was probably unfairly dismissed as a result of events that occurred at the Workhouse there in 1846.¹⁸ The views of the Assistant Commissioners on the new legislation and on local officials and those in receipt of relief can be gleaned from their correspondence with the Central Commission. This correspondence is referenced in the following discussion of the setting up of the unions. Hawley in particular was most forthright in his criticism of high spending parishes and of the labourers who he felt often abused the system. He complained that: 'humanity mongers who corrupted paupers with easy relief', encouraged, 'idleness, riots and debauchery'. Hawley appears to have been overly impressed by social status and reserved his praise for those officials who were members of the aristocracy.¹⁹

Assistant Commissioners were responsible for combining parishes to form NPL unions. The general principle was that the parishes should encircle a central market town. This was not always achieved, notably in areas where there was strong influence from local members of the aristocracy. In the west of Sussex, where there were ten incorporations set up under the OPL, the Duke of Richmond requested that the guardians, who were mostly his tenants, dissolve the Westhampnett incorporation. It was replaced by the Westhampnett union which was dominated by Richmond interest. In eastern Sussex there were no incorporations and the pattern planned by the Commissioners was largely achieved although not without initial resistance from some members of the aristocracy. The Earl of Chichester had refused to include Lewes within the Newhaven union and Lord Gage wanted to keep his sphere separate in West Firle. In Lewes neighbouring parishes were reluctant to unite, and in rural areas there was

¹⁸ Parker found that paupers had been gnawing on bones which they had been set to crush. This caused an outcry in the press. Staff at the workhouse resigned and the following year the Poor Law Commission was replaced by the Poor Law Board; some historians argue that this was a direct result of the Andover scandal: S. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester: 2017), 224-227. Jones and King have pointed out that despite featuring in most historical accounts of the NPL workhouse, Andover was not an isolated case. There was considerable public debate promoted by press coverage regarding workhouse conditions, notably by the 1860s: Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 21, 22.

¹⁹ D. Roberts, *Victorian Origins*, 171.

suspicion between parishes and a strong feeling of localism. John Ellman, the longstanding overseer at Glynde, was critical of the way officials in other parishes administered poor relief.²⁰

The organisation of relief by a regional body rather than by individual parishes was a significant innovation established by the PLAA. It is important to consider how the parishes forming a union compared with each other in terms of the number of relief recipients and also expenditure prior to unionisation. This is not a question that has been closely examined in the historiography. Figure 4.2 in Chapter Four of this study shows the number of names/households on the relief lists in 1831 for those study parishes with data. The results indicate that the number of relief recipients was similar in the individual parishes which combined to make up each Sussex union.²¹ This discussion has already observed that there were smaller parishes with less unemployment in downland regions which meant that more compatible communities could combine to form unions. A similar picture emerges when considering expenditure per head of the population. This figure was included in the 1832 government enquiries and costs were closely aligned amongst the parishes that made up each union. The lowest costs were in the Newhaven union parishes and the study parish for Lewes. However, as noted in Chapter Four, Berwick which was close to the Downs, was exceptional in having more in common with some of the wealden parishes with expenses at over one pound per head.²²

Population sizes in the study unions varied from only 2,367 and 4,224 in the downland unions of West Firle and Newhaven to 13,929 and 15,949 in the wealden unions of Hailsham and

²⁰ The study parishes formed two unions in the Weald: Hailsham with Laughton, Chiddingly, Hellingly and seven other parishes; Uckfield with Rotherfield, East Hoathly, Waldron and seven other parishes; Newhaven on the Downs with Rottingdean, Rodmell, Piddinghoe and seven other parishes; Berwick, Alciston and Glynde joined West Firle at the foot of the Downs with four other parishes and seven parishes of Lewes including St John Sub Castro formed the Lewes union. Wells discusses the formation of the new Sussex unions: R. Wells, 'The Poor Law 1700-1900' in K. Leslie and B. Short (eds.), *An Historical Atlas of Sussex* (Chichester: 1999). Ellman's views are recorded in F. Walesby's biography, *Memoir of Mr. Ellman* (Lewes: 1847). Rothery also found that Lord Salisbury prevented the joining of two unions in Hertfordshire: K. Rothery, 'The Implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire c. 1830-1847, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016), 99.

²¹ For example, the number of households on the relief lists ranged between 142 and 164 in the parishes of Hailsham, Laughton and Hellingly which became part of the Hailsham union; 15 to 28 for the parishes of Newhaven and Piddinghoe which became part of the Newhaven union, and 15 to 21 for the parishes of Berwick and Alciston which joined the West Firle union.

²² Costs per head of population in 1831: Hailsham £1.9s.1d., Chiddingly £1.6s.11d., Hellingly £1.15s.1d.; Rotherfield 19s., Waldron £1.2s.11d.; Newhaven 11s.2d., Rottingdean 5s. 6d.; Berwick £1.4s., Alciston 16s.; St John Sub Castro 7s.6d.

Uckfield. Lewes union had a population of 9,199.²³ These southern unions were far smaller than in many northern industrial areas; in the unions of Bolton and Huddersfield there were populations of 72,000 and 100,000 respectively.²⁴ The number of people in a union could be an issue when accommodating the indoor poor hence the problem in industrial towns of providing indoor relief during times of economic downturn. However, arguably the focus of the Poor Law Commissioners had always been on southern labourers and the deterrent workhouse was predominantly viewed as a means of controlling relief numbers in the southeast rather than a solution to temporary crises in manufacturing areas, as we have seen above. Nonetheless, even within eastern Sussex the larger wealden unions on several occasions had to resort to outdoor relief as there was insufficient room in the workhouse.

Transferring control of poor relief from parishes to unions represented a major interference in local government, even though parishes continued to play a role in NPL business. It is therefore not surprising that there was opposition to the PLAA amongst all strata of society: labourers, ratepayers and politicians, including both paternalistic Tories and Radicals.²⁵ Local resistance occurred at different times as the new unions were formed firstly in the Midlands and the South, and later in the North. In the South opposition was particularly strong in areas which had experienced the Swing Riots, notably Kent and Sussex.²⁶ Anti-poor law activity included demonstrations at meetings of the new boards of guardians and attacks on relieving officers. Those involved were predominantly labourers, but as in the Swing Riots, they were on occasion supported by local farmers.

More widespread opposition to the new legislation was voiced through national and local newspapers and journals.²⁷ The growth of the press which began during the late-eighteenth century and greatly increased in the 1830s, when various tax reductions led to a rise in cheap daily newspapers, meant that many people had access to information on the poor laws and had the opportunity to share their opinions. Newspapers printed copies of the NPL regulations which supports more recent arguments in the historiography that the poor and their advocates

²³ These figures are based on the 1841 censuses for the parishes in each union quoted in the 1851 Post Office Directory which includes *Sussex: Post office Directory of the Six Home Counties, Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex* (London: 1851).

²⁴ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 239; Driver, *Power and Pauperism*, 131.

²⁵ Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 10.

²⁶ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 74.

²⁷ The *Brighton Patriot* criticised the NPL throughout its years of publication from 1835 to 1839: *Brighton Patriot*, British Library Newspapers, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

often had a good knowledge of their rights within the law. George Poulett Scrope, the Liberal MP for Stroud, wrote in the *Quarterly Review* that the NPL represented an abrogation of the legal and ancient rights of the poor to existence, a view which resonated with some farmers and squires. The editor of *The Times*, John Walter, was also a staunch opponent of the legislation driven partly by resistance to centralisation.²⁸

However, several local newspapers appeared to support the new law. In the southeast these included the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, the *Essex Standard* and the *Southampton Herald*. These papers were concerned about the cost of the poor rates and were keen to see the restoration of the 'independent labourer'. In Sussex the *Brighton Patriot* was the one publication which was an ardent critic of the NPL, publishing harrowing articles notably about the separation of elderly couples in the workhouse.²⁹ Public opinion was important; its significance is revealed in the words of one of the Uckfield union guardians, the Earl of Liverpool, when in 1837 he had the thankless task of giving his consent to an amputation in the workhouse. Concerned to ensure he took the correct decision, he made the following comment: 'As it is well known how jealously the public watches the proceedings of the Poor Law Amendment Act, no circumstance may by possibility occur to impeach any of the proceedings in the Uckfield union.'³⁰

Information on resistance to the NPL in the study parishes can be gleaned from the local newspapers and also from the correspondence of Assistant Commissioner Hawley. Areas of the Weald had been involved in the riots of 1830 and it is in this region that opposition to the legislation was most apparent. At the first meeting of the guardians in the study union of Uckfield approximately 300 labourers, guardians and rate payers expressed discontent and several women entered the workhouse to remove the elderly couples. The main cause of the protest was the decision of the guardians to restrict the provision of a flour allowance to families with four or more children rather than three or more children which was the practice under the OPL. Families with fewer than four children would only be offered relief in the workhouse. Opposition was swiftly suppressed by the appointment of special constables; the

²⁸ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 68.

²⁹ The *Essex Standard* referred to being pleased to see labourers carting barrows of manure to the parish allotment which was better than seeing them 'eat the bread of idleness': *Essex Standard*, 8th January, 1836; the *Southampton Herald* editorial was gratified to see a decrease in spending on relief: *Southampton Herald*, 5th March, 1836; the *Brighton Patriot* discussed the case of Stapley, a labourer referred to the workhouse while he had a young child and sick wife at home, *Brighton Patriot*, 2nd February, 1836, British Library Newspapers.

³⁰ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), Uckfield union board of guardians' minute book (hereafter Uckfield minutes), 1836-1839, G/11/1a/1.

influence of the Earl of Liverpool, who chaired the new union, may also have been a factor in ending outward resistance. In May 1835, shortly after the demonstrations, the following notice was printed in Lewes and distributed locally. Unfortunately, there is no record of who wrote the notice:

Fellow labourers don't be deceived (by rumours of harsh treatment)

Wives if you love your husbands keep them from all unlawful meetings

All who assemble to resist and break the laws are punishable by Transportation or Death

There will be no treadmill in any of the workhouses

The law says every man shall have proper wages and not parish pay. Is that hard?

If a poor man has more children than he can maintain he may send them to the School, where they will be kept, well clothed, well taught for nothing. Their parents may see them every day of the week.

Regarding separation of men and women. Better to be separated for a short while than for ever if the husband is transported. Do you want 6 or 8 men and their wives to sleep in the same room?

People can choose whether to go to the workhouse. Is this Hard?³¹

Despite this local opposition, Hawley was satisfied with the running of the first union meeting and impressed by the guardians of the Uckfield union who consisted of, 'influential and respectable individuals'.³² In addition to the Earl of Liverpool as chairman, the vice-chair was William Day, a landed proprietor who later became a Poor Law Commissioner. Hawley's attitude towards the guardians in the other wealden union in this study, Hailsham, was very different. Their chairman, Richard King Sampson, was opposed to the PLAA. Hawley noted in a letter to the Commissioners, 'I am perfectly convinced that these guardians, like infants, are not to be left a minute alone.... they wish to interpret and twist their orders so as to suit their own views, and throw all into confusion.'³³ It is difficult to establish whether the motivation for resisting the NPL was the same for officials as for labourers. The discussion below suggests that the guardians, for example in Hailsham, had some sympathy for the poor but they were also concerned by the threat of centralisation and any impact on the cost of poor relief to the ratepayers.

³¹ The National Archives (TNA), Uckfield union, 1835-36, MH 12/13157.

³² Ibid.

³³ TNA, Hailsham union, 1835-36, MH 12/12931.

The other union in this Sussex study which attempted to oppose the NPL was Lewes. In fact, Hawley was so concerned by the attitude of the Lewes residents that he postponed setting up the union until August 1835. Tradesmen dominated local government in the town and they objected to, 'removing a large proportion of parochial management from local elected people'. Such was their concern regarding interference in local affairs from central government that the tradesmen sent petitions first to the Poor Law Commission and later to the House of Commons arguing that the Commissioners should not be allowed to interfere with the giving or withholding of outdoor relief.³⁴ The Lewes residents complained that Hawley was reluctant to engage with local people preferring to speak only with the magistrates. They were also concerned that the twenty-five pound rate proposed by Hawley would mean that few people would qualify to be a guardian.³⁵ The guardians wanted the local press to be present at their meetings but this was opposed by Hawley. Opposition to any form of interference from central government was still evident in Lewes in 1838 when the residents sent a petition to parliament asking for powers to be transferred from the Commissioners to the guardians.³⁶ However, it would be wrong to regard Lewes as presenting a totally united front as the individual parishes objected to joining together as a union. The views of the Lewes tradesmen were echoed by tradesmen in the market town of Sittingbourne in Kent. The 'respectable' tradesmen in Sittingbourne were also opposed to interference from a central authority. They did not want to unite their parishes to join a union, noting that one guardian could not easily represent 2,200 people.³⁷

In contrast to Lewes, Hawley's correspondence suggests that the downland unions of Newhaven and West Firle were more receptive to the new regulations. He was positive about the West Firle union with Lord Gage as an ex-officio member of the Board. At the first meeting of the guardians Hawley noted a sense of, 'good feeling and unanimity'. He was also complimentary about the Newhaven union which had, 'the advantage of the Earl of

³⁴ TNA, Lewes union, 1834-35, MH 12/13015. Eastwood noted that by the early-nineteenth century petitions were an important measure adopted by provincial England to influence parliament: Eastwood, *Government and Community*, 76. Rothery recorded that the parishioners of Hitchin in Hertfordshire prepared a petition for parliament but did not send it: Rothery, 'The Implementation', 121/122.

³⁵ TNA, Lewes union, 1834-35, MH 12/13015. Rothery referred to the Hertfordshire parishes setting the property rate for guardian qualification, generally between twenty pounds and thirty pounds: Rothery, 'The implementation', 142. However, in Lewes this was determined by the Assistant Commissioner.

³⁶ ESRO, *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, 19th March, 1838.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, July 6th 1835.

Chichester's great abilities and experience' as chairman.³⁸ However, there was opposition from labourers, certainly in the Newhaven union, albeit on a smaller, more piecemeal scale than in the wealden unions. The union clerk recorded in 1836 that the governor of the new workhouse was 'assailed with abusive language' whenever he walked through the streets.³⁹ It is possible that labourers in the more 'open' parishes in the Weald had greater freedom to protest than those in the smaller more 'closed' downland parishes. There is little mention of involvement in the Swing Riots in the downland area. The overseer for Rottingdean noted in response to the question on riots in the 1832 government enquiries that, 'there were none in this immediate neighbourhood.'⁴⁰ It is clear from Chapter Four that there was less unemployment and subsequent poverty in the downland parishes under the OPL and possibly less reason for protest. As the new unions were being established, there were contemporary comments on intra-regional differences in poor relief. For example, the auditor for the West Firle union noted that: 'The parishes in this neighbourhood are chiefly upon and near the South Downs and as they contain very few surplus labourers the savings (of having a workhouse) cannot under any circumstances be so great as in the Weald of Sussex!'⁴¹

So far the discussion has touched on the influence of a few individuals, in particular members of the aristocracy who chaired the early union meetings and the Assistant Commissioners who worked with local officials. However, the key question of the extent of local versus central control in relief practice after 1834 hinges on the personalities of the individuals elected to represent each parish on the boards of guardians. Very little work has been done on the background of relief officials with the exception of Karen Rothery's important study of four NPL unions in Hertfordshire discussed in Chapter Two. Rothery challenged the Webbs' assertion that guardians were mainly retail tradesmen or farmers as the Hertfordshire unions included gentry, professionals such as lawyers and bankers, and clergy on the boards. It is likely that there were local variations in the occupations of guardians based on local economies. Other studies have found that urban guardians were predominantly shopkeepers, merchants and manufacturers.⁴² When devising the new legislation Chadwick had acknowledged the need for

³⁸ TNA, Newhaven, 1835-42, MH 12/13046.

³⁹ ESRO, Newhaven Union Letter Book, G/7/8.

⁴⁰ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*, 1834, 522.

⁴¹ TNA, West Firle, 1835-38, MH 12/13189.

⁴² Rothery, 'The Implementation', 135-158; P. Tolley, 'The Birmingham, Aston and Kings Norton Board of Guardians and the Politics and Administration of the Poor Law, 1836-1912', (Unpublished PhD thesis, De Montfort

some local control but felt that it should be in the hands of a different class of men than the previous overseers. The development of an elective principle based on property rights should ensure that new powers were given to men of greater means than those of the parish vestry.⁴³ However, King and Midwinter argue that there was continuity of personnel between the Old and New Poor Laws in many instances.⁴⁴

Evidence from the Sussex parishes supports the notion of continuity in office-holders as several overseers and churchwardens under the OPL became NPL guardians. This was notably the case in small parishes where very few people met the general criteria of being a twenty-to-thirty-pound property holder. Of the twenty new guardians representing the study parishes, at least half can be identified as previous relief officials and this was the case in all the small downland parishes. Some had held office over a period of twenty years. This study also indicates that the background of the guardians varied according to the local economy. Farmers dominated the rural boards. The occupation of seventeen of the guardians can be identified from the 1841 census; there were fourteen farmers, one brewer, one shoemaker and one baker. Most of the farmer-guardians farmed on a large scale and, just as during the OPL, these officials would have employed a number of the poor requesting relief. Three from the Weald had two or three 'living-in' farm workers. However, in the port of Newhaven and town of Lewes the guardians were engaged in a wider range of occupations. In 1843 the Lewes parishes were represented by a spirit merchant, maltster, hotel keeper, land surveyor, ironmonger, builder and timber merchant.⁴⁵ There was at least one farmer, Thomas Tourle who had been the overseer for St John Sub Castro.

A number of ex-officio members attended the union meetings; they were often magistrates and members of the local aristocracy. Other studies note that ex-officio members frequently chaired the meetings and this was the situation in eastern Sussex.⁴⁶ The Earl of Chichester chaired the Newhaven Union, the Earl of Liverpool was chairman of the Uckfield union and Lord Gage chaired the West Fittleton union. These were men with large estates based on agriculture.

University, 1994); M. Rose, 'The Administration of the Poor Law in the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1820-1855', (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1965).

⁴³ Eastwood, *Government and Community*, 165.

⁴⁴ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 250; Midwinter, 'State Intervention', 10. Snell notes that a greater knowledge of the poor in rural areas tended to mean that outdoor relief continued and less use was made of the workhouse test: Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, 255.

⁴⁵ TNA, Lewes union, 1843-47, MH 12/13017.

⁴⁶ Rothery, 'The Implementation'; Rose, 'The Administration of the Poor Law'.

They acted as chair for several years which may have been different from some of the unions studied by Digby in the eastern counties.⁴⁷ The concept of including ex-officio members was particularly unpopular amongst the Lewes tradesmen. Their petition to parliament in February 1836 complained that the Lord Lieutenant of Sussex, the Duke of Richmond, had the power to recommend J.P.s who could automatically become guardians. Thus, he could outnumber the board of guardians and, 'vest the entire and irresponsible management of the poor in his own hands.'⁴⁸

From the discussion above it seems that local officials had varying views on the PLAA. Some like King Sampson in Hailsham and a number of Lewes guardians were opposed while others including the Earl of Chichester and Lord Gage disliked certain aspects such as combining parishes or interfering with their areas of authority. To further address the question of whether the new officials supported or opposed the legislation it is necessary to look more closely at their relief policies after 1834. All five unions in this study were established in 1835 between February and August. Despite the opposition shown by some parishes to the PLAA, the guardians began to implement the new regulations. These included making provision for indoor relief, selling off parish property to raise money either for improvements to the present workhouses or to build a new workhouse, and appointing officers, including relieving officers and workhouse staff. However, resistance to some of the new regulations from guardians in all the unions is apparent in the boards of guardians' minute books during the first years of the NPL. In particular concerns were raised over the ending of outdoor relief payments and the use of the workhouse for certain groups of people. These two aspects of relief are considered below. Firstly, the supply of outdoor relief is discussed and includes an analysis of the number and profile of recipients at the end of the Old and the beginning of the New Poor Laws. Outdoor relief is discussed within each union separately as it is a complex issue. Comparison is made between unions and includes an assessment of the approach of the new guardians to the directives issued by the Commissioners.

⁴⁷ Digby noted that control of the boards of guardians was often transferred from landowners to tenant farmers: A. Digby, 'The labour market and the continuity of social policy after 1834: The case of the eastern counties', *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975), 69-83.

⁴⁸ *Brighton Patriot*, 9th February, 1836, British Library Newspapers.

Table 5.1 Number of people in receipt of outdoor relief in the study parishes during the Old and New Poor Laws⁴⁹

Parish	Population in 1831	1803 PP Permanent adults (Adults, children, non-p and occasional)	1832 PP Last week not in a workhouse (May include dependents)	1832 Parish records (Names listed annually)	1836 Union Ledgers (Names listed quarterly)	1842 Union Ledgers
Hailsham W	1445	17 (222)	112	164	48	
Laughton W	804	19 (128)		142	45	
Chiddingly W	902	28 (148)	240		50	
Hellingly W	1504	108 (429)	818		92	
Uckfield W	1261	36 (158)			12-27	
Rotherfield W	3097	97 (505)	1250	313	45-79	
East Hoathly W	505	22 (59)			10-12	
Waldron W	997	78 (291)	250		35-54	
Newhaven D	904	11 (49)	50	28	13-45	
Rottingdean D	880	10 (74)	12 (incl bastards)		11-13	
Piddinghoe D *	231	11 (31)		15	3-14	
Rodmell D *	350	13 (70)			4-29	
Alciston D	266	10 (34)	25			15-25
Glynde D	276	13 (46)	12 cash 100 rent			5-10
Berwick D	203	23 (64)	0	15		5-10
Lewes (St John Sub Castro)	2421	41 (110)	200	140	149 (1837)	

Table 5.1 above shows the number of people in receipt of outdoor relief between 1803 and the early 1840s in the study parishes so that the impact of the new legislation on outdoor relief numbers can be assessed. The elderly, disabled and widows with children continued to receive a small relief pension after 1834. Moreover, guardians had some discretion to support the able-bodied in cases of ‘sudden and urgent necessity’, due to a clause embedded in the prohibitory orders.⁵⁰ Therefore, outdoor payments did not completely disappear from the union records. The figures for the NPL years in Table 5.1 are likely to have included some temporary payments as well as regular pensions. It is only possible to make general observations regarding whether the numbers in the table went up, remained stable or went down as the various sources include different data. For example, the 1832 parish records show total households named over a year while the union ledgers provide quarterly totals. The Uckfield and West Firle ledgers

⁴⁹ *Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of the poor in England*, PP 1803-4, C.175; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners, 1834*. Information on outdoor relief is not included in the Firle ledgers until 1842. The Hailsham and Lewes ledgers are only available for part of 1836 therefore data is given for one quarter in the table. The parish and union records are listed in the bibliography.

⁵⁰ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 85. Prohibitory orders were initially issued to individual unions but a general Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order was issued to unions in less populated areas in 1844.

only give expenditure on relief and so for the parishes in these unions the number of people on the outdoor lists is an estimate based on an average pension of 3s. per household.⁵¹

Turning firstly to the wealden union of Uckfield, allowing for variations in the way data was recorded, it is still clear from the table that for two parishes, Rotherfield and Waldron there was a marked decrease in numbers between 1832 and 1836. It is probable that this can be explained by a drop in outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers. In his reports to the Commissioners Hawley included information on outdoor relief numbers for the parishes that joined the Uckfield union at the end of the OPL. His figures are given in Table 5.2 below and show that labourers were receiving relief in aid of wages in 1834. This was a form of relief detested by the Commissioners and it was unlikely to have continued under the NPL. We also know from records of the first union meeting discussed above that payments of a flour allowance to families were reduced.

Further cuts that could affect outdoor relief numbers include the ending of rental payments for poor households. The guardians appear to have gone along with this directive from the Commissioners but they asked whether they would be contravening the rule if they were to hire cottages for the poor to live in.⁵² The Commissioners' response has not survived. If rents were no longer paid it may have caused considerable hardship. It was noted in the previous chapter that rents for the study parishes averaged four to five pounds a year. For a labourer earning ten to twelve shillings a week this would have been approximately one seventh of his wages while for the elderly poor possibly relying heavily on their small relief pension it would have been very difficult indeed unless they were able to live with their extended family.⁵³ There is further evidence that the Uckfield guardians managed to reduce outdoor relief numbers; a few months after the first meeting of the board Hawley refers to a 'great reduction' in the number of paupers in each parish.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 3s. has been selected as most of the outdoor poor under the NPL were regular pensioners receiving 2s.6d-3s.

⁵² TNA, Uckfield union, 1835-36, MH 12/13157.e

⁵³ Several Sussex parishes referred to the wages of agricultural labourers in the 1832 enquiries which averaged 10s. to 12s.; *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners*, 1834.

⁵⁴ TNA, Uckfield union, 1835-36, MH 12/13157.

Table 5.2 Number of people receiving outdoor relief in 1834 in the parishes that went on to form the Uckfield union in 1835 based on Assistant Commissioner Hawley's figures⁵⁵

Parish	Population In 1841	A.B men out of employ	A.B. women	Aged and Infirm	Children entirely supported by the parish	Labourers receiving relief in aid of wages	Wives	Children
Fletching	1914	70	40	19	187	1	0	0
Waldron	1065		2	31	16	44	No return	134
Maresfield	1578	13	11	32	47	14	14	68
Buxted	1574	8	8	31	20	40	40	250
E. Hoathly	607	1	1	32	6	12	8	47
Isfield	477	-	3	10	11	14	14	45
Mayfield	2943	8	20	17	12	205	168	588
Uckfield	1534	-	-	14	10	22	21	47
Little Horsted	278	-	2	4	5	14	15	63
Framfield	1434	50	37	2	19	No return	No return	No return
Rotherfield	3054	37	40	130	10	200	200	890

Hawley's positive comments about the Uckfield guardians together with the apparent cuts in the provision of outdoor relief might suggest that at least some of the guardians supported the NPL. Indeed, they sent a letter to a review committee proposed by Lord John Russell in 1837 stating, 'the new system of Poor Laws has worked well, and has produced very great advantages both to the ratepayers and the honest hard-working labourers'. At the same time they noted that they did not want any further interference with the act.⁵⁶ In fact, on several occasions the guardians disputed the Commissioners' policies indicating that they felt some resistance to central dictates. In 1837 the Earl of Liverpool asked the Commissioners for a suspension of the order prohibiting outdoor relief. While the Commissioners did not agree, it is evident from the minute books that use was being made of exceptions in the prohibitory orders as there are references to individual requests for exceptional relief being recorded in the relieving officer's book. The guardians were also keen to continue sending relief to non-resident widows and children, although again the Commissioners would not agree. The

⁵⁵ TNA, Uckfield union, 1835-36, MH 12/13157.

⁵⁶ ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1836-39, G/11/1a/1.

guardians argued that it enabled parishioners to seek work elsewhere. It would also have ensured that the poor did not return to receive more costly indoor support.⁵⁷

A further dispute which continued over several years between The Earl of Liverpool as chairman and the Commissioners concerned an established practice of taking only the male head of a household into the workhouse and providing relief to the families at home (the opposite practice to that of Lewes and Hailsham cited below where the family was taken into the house). The Earl noted that much had already been done in a very short time to reduce the poor rates but 'precipitation should be avoided'.⁵⁸ In the area covered by the union there were high levels of unemployment exacerbated by bad weather and the guardians did not want to break up the homes of the poor.⁵⁹ They had some success as the minutes refer to at least one case of a father being relieved in the workhouse and his family being supported at home. Most of the disputes between the guardians and the Commissioners were regarding support of the able-bodied. Relief of the elderly and infirm was not contested; Hawley reports that they were provided with pensions of up to 2s. 6d. It is noteworthy that the pension level had changed little since the previous century.⁶⁰

Comparison between Uckfield and the other wealden union of Hailsham is interesting as the Hailsham board of guardians did not include a member of the aristocracy. The parishes in both unions had experienced high levels of demand on the relief system under the OPL but, as noted above, Hawley expected to see less co-operation from the Hailsham guardians. However, Table 5.1 shows a reduction in the number of people receiving outdoor relief in the parishes that joined the Hailsham union. Yet, there was clearly a need for support as the minute books indicate that the guardians were struggling to help labourers during periods of unemployment in the mid-late-1830s. In December 1836 they turned to the individual parishes for assistance

⁵⁷ Chadwick and Nicholls were keen to ban relief to non-resident paupers after 1834, arguing that it was difficult for parish officers and ratepayers to monitor paupers at a distance; however, it survived and was regulated under the 1844 Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order: Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, 238. Payments to non-resident parishioners continued in most of the parishes/unions in this study under the NPL.

⁵⁸ ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1836-39, G/11/1a/1.

⁵⁹ TNA, Uckfield union, 1835-36, MH 12/13157. The concern that it was unrealistic to provide indoor relief to all unemployed labourers during temporary spells of unemployment was not dissimilar to the concern in many industrial areas that the workhouse was not the answer to periods of economic depression.

⁶⁰ In fact these pensions in Sussex may have been higher than in other areas. Karel Williams suggests that the mean average pension in 1840 was 1s. 1d: Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty*. Nevertheless, the pensions were not sufficient for subsistence, especially without additional payments such as rent and fuel which were common in the study parishes under the OPL.

asking each parish surveyor to employ able-bodied men with large families who had no work due to inclement weather thus avoiding, 'the very unpleasant alternative of refusing relief'. Again, in October 1837 there was considerable destitution due to the high price of provisions and each parish was asked to try to find employment.⁶¹ This is an important example of the ongoing involvement of parish vestries and overseers under the NPL. It also indicates a reluctance to make use of the workhouse to accommodate high numbers of able-bodied men in periods of temporary unemployment; a view shared by guardians in some northern manufacturing areas.⁶²

By 1839 the Hailsham guardians were providing short-term exceptional relief mainly in cases of illness or accident. Individual requests, predominantly from able-bodied labourers, were being considered at each meeting. There were approximately six to eight requests from each parish in the union; most of the relief was given in kind in the form of flour and mutton although some cash was paid. A number of names occur regularly and certain individuals received support over several months, notably if they had disabling conditions such as consumption. However, when comparing these few names with the number of families receiving regular relief in the Hailsham union parishes in table 4.4 in Chapter Four (sixty-seven families in Laughton, forty four in Hailsham), it is clear that outdoor relief to the able-bodied was much reduced in the late-1830s. This may have had a bigger impact on certain parishes such as Laughton. This is important as it indicates that parishes were forced to make adjustments when joining a union.

A number of the Commissioners' directives were questioned by the guardians in the Hailsham union and their concerns were similar to those expressed by the Uckfield officials. They asked whether they could maintain outdoor relief for the able-bodied, noting that it was difficult to offer permanent employment to labourers. However, the Commissioners' response was unsympathetic; they replied that those with large families should seek work in districts with higher wages!⁶³ The guardians also asked wanted to continue to relieve non-resident paupers who often lived in neighbouring parishes. They noted that there was a shortage of accommodation in the area. Yet again the response they received was unsympathetic as they

⁶¹ ESRO, Hailsham union board of guardians' minute book (Hailsham minutes), 1836-38, G/5/1a/1.

⁶² Parish vestries continued to be involved in arranging emigration for poor families, they were consulted on issues regarding 'common charges' in the union and on arranging apprenticeships with local employers; ESRO, Lewes board of guardians' minute books (Lewes minutes), 1848-51, G/6/1a/4. For discussion on the use of a workhouse in manufacturing areas see: Eric Midwinter, 'State Intervention'.

⁶³ TNA, Hailsham union, 1835-36, MH 12/12931.

were told that the workhouse should be the only option.⁶⁴ When supporting families the guardians wished to offer relief to the male head of the household and send some of the children into the workhouse; they contacted the Uckfield union to enquire about their policy on relieving families in the workhouse.⁶⁵ Reductions in outdoor relief payments mainly affected the able-bodied in Hailsham. As in the Uckfield union, regular pensions in cash and kind continued to be paid to the aged and infirm, and additional flour was given when the price of flour was high. However, in 1840 the board decided to revise the list of permanent paupers who were being relieved due to age, infirmity or disability. The Medical Officer was asked to determine whether each pauper still required relief, although the results of that assessment were not recorded.

Comparison between these largely rural wealden unions can be made with a town union by considering outdoor relief payments after 1834 in the Lewes parish of St John Sub Castro. Data in Table 5.1 shows very little change in outdoor relief numbers between 1832 and 1837, particularly if the figure from the ledgers is used. However, in Hawley's correspondence in 1836 he refers to a drop in pensions in St John Sub Castro from 109 to 49 which suggests that the figure of 149 in 1837 in Table 5.1 included people in receipt of temporary payments for illness or 'sudden and urgent necessity'. Hawley also referred to forty-six households having their wages supplemented in 1834, a payment which probably ended following the NPL.⁶⁶ It is apparent from the more detailed Hailsham union minutes that most people receiving relief due to illness did so for a very short period of time, often one or two weeks. It is likely therefore that while the number of outdoor poor appears similar at the end of the OPL and the start of the NPL in Lewes in Table 5.1, more of the NPL paupers received very short term, temporary relief.

⁶⁴ The Hailsham minutes include totals of non-resident poor in the early 1840s; there was an average of five to ten households for each parish: ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1843-45, G/5/1a/5.

⁶⁵ Shave discussed the importance of networking between local officials which enabled them to share some practices: S. Shave, *Pauper Policies*, 150-196.

⁶⁶ TNA, Lewes union, 1834-35, MH 12/13015. Somewhat frustratingly the overseers' responses to the 1832 enquiries provide different information as they state that no relief was given in aid of wages but about 200 men and women received an allowance in cash and flour (as shown in the HCPP column in Table 5.1): *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners*, 1834. This may well reflect the varying interpretations of 'paying an allowance' made by respondents to the 1832 enquiries and noted in the historiography; Blaug wrote that respondents confused allowances paid to men in employment (whether single or married) with child allowance payments: M. Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report re-examined', *Journal of Economic History*, 24 (1964), 231.

It is possible to gain an idea of the profile of the outdoor poor in Lewes from a record in the guardians' minute book for 1841 which lists outdoor relief recipients. In one week there were: twenty two aged and infirm, four orphan children, six widows, eighteen relieved due to disability or accident, twenty four vagrants or non-resident and thirty eight children of families, a total of 112 people. Several of the children were likely to have been in families of those being relieved due to disability or accident and together with vagrant numbers there were therefore many temporary relief recipients.⁶⁷ Considering these figures only represent one of seven parishes in Lewes, the number of vagrants in the town was high. The other study parish which mentions supplying relief to vagrants is the town of Newhaven. The PLAA of 1834 made no reference to vagrants but by 1837 the Commissioners acknowledged that there were a number of destitute people which needed some form of temporary shelter and that no tramp or 'casual' should be refused overnight lodging.⁶⁸ However the vagrants listed in 1841 were given outdoor relief which was possibly unusual. One explanation might be the limited space in the Lewes workhouses which is noted in Chapter Six.

The Lewes guardians were similar to those in Uckfield and Hailsham in questioning some of the Commissioners' directives. They asked for an able-bodied pauper in search of work to be given relief and have some of his children supported in the workhouse but the Commissioners would not agree. The guardians also wished to continue supporting women with bastard children out of the workhouse, the response from the Commission is not available. Fraught relations between the Lewes officials and the Central Authority are evident on a number of occasions in the minute books. In 1838 the Commissioners had received a letter of complaint against Mr Kell, the union clerk, but would not divulge who the complainant was. The guardians argued that the complaint was unfounded and was an affront to the character of the clerk; the chairman and vice chair resigned in February. When new officials were appointed in April, only the vice chair returned. On another occasion Assistant Commissioner Tufnell challenged the annual expenditure figures given by the auditor for the three years between March 1836 and March 1839. The auditor's figures showed that expenditure had been reduced by £1,940. However, Tufnell attended a meeting of the guardians and said that he had been instructed to

⁶⁷ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1839-43, G/6/1a/2.

⁶⁸ M.Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The history of an English social institution* (London: (1981), 33.

include extra costs in the figure for 1836 such as overseers' expenses, magistrates' clerks' fees and premiums for apprentices. The result was a higher reduction in spending of £2,919.⁶⁹

As the discussion moves on to compare the downland unions with those in the Weald and Lewes, it is important to note that the populations involved are much smaller. The records for the West Firle union have not survived well for the NPL period and information is based on the union ledgers and the Assistant Commissioners' correspondence. In Table 5.1 the number of people on outdoor relief in all of the parishes is low, ranging between five and twenty-five. However, the data from the 1832 enquiries indicates that in at least one of the parishes, Glynde, up to one hundred people may have been affected if the guardians abided by the Commissioners' directive to end all rental payments. In 1838 the chairman of the union and the representative for Glynde, John Ellman (son of the overseer John Ellman discussed in Chapter Four) noted that expenditure had been cut by half since the introduction of the NPL while the poor had not suffered.⁷⁰ The records do not confirm whether rents were no longer paid; a cut in rental payments would have enabled savings to be made but the poor would surely have felt the effects. As in the other unions, the West Firle guardians challenged some of the Commissioners' directives. They wanted to support men with families out of the workhouse but the Commissioners would not agree to the 'vicious principle' of paying wages out of rates.⁷¹

The views of some of the guardians, including Ellman, regarding the new regulations are revealed in a meeting held in 1838 between Assistant Commissioner Tufnell and four Sussex unions: Lewes, Newhaven, West Firle and Chailey (north-west of Lewes). The meeting was recorded in the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*. Tufnell proposed combining these unions to save money by reducing the number of workhouses from eight to three and at the same time ensuring that classification of the elderly, adults and children in separate workhouses could be achieved and the education of children improved.⁷² However, he was also motivated by politics as he remarked that there was a danger of party and political feelings being mixed up in Lewes,

⁶⁹ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1835-39, G/6/1a/1.

⁷⁰ ESRO, *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, 12th February 1838.

⁷¹ TNA, West Firle union, 1835-38, MH 12/13189.

⁷² The Commissioners wished to establish separate institutions for different pauper classes such as children, the elderly, the able-bodied, but this was not followed through in many of the unions: Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 76.

this could become less of an issue in a bigger union.⁷³ Most of the officials from the unions were opposed to the idea including Ellman. He disagreed with the argument about childrens' education as it was, 'by no means thought that writing was generally useful to female servants'. He also said that town guardians could not make decisions about the country. He supported the NPL but this measure 'went too far'. Tufnell's proposal did not go ahead as the proposition was put before the parish ratepayers and it was turned down. This demonstrates the strength of 'localism' in the area; reluctance to combine parishes into unions in eastern Sussex has already been noted and residents were even more reluctant to combine unions. The guardians at the meeting with Tufnell argued that town and rural guardians have different 'feelings'.⁷⁴

One official who supported Tufnell's proposal was the Earl of Chichester, chairman of the Newhaven union. This is surprising, as it was noted above that in 1835 the Earl opposed the suggestion of including Lewes in a union with the downland parishes. However, like Tufnell, the Earl was interested in the education of workhouse children and was in favour of being in a union with more than one workhouse.⁷⁵ The situation regarding outdoor relief numbers in the early years of the NPL for the Newhaven union was similar to the other downland union of West Firle. Table 5.1 indicates that the numbers on outdoor relief were reasonably consistent between the end of the OPL and the early years of the NPL, although the figures slightly increased in 1838 and 1839, particularly in Rottingdean where they reached forty-six. The clerk of the union recorded in October 1835 that no able-bodied male paupers were receiving relief in the union and in July 1836 that no rents were to be paid to the able-bodied. This suggests that rents may still have been paid for others such as the old and infirm but it is not clear. In the same year, once the new workhouse was ready, an order was issued that all those under sixty should only be offered the workhouse.

However, Newhaven was similar to the other unions in making use of the option to provide outdoor relief on medical grounds including to the able-bodied.⁷⁶ From 1838 the union minutes include lists of individual requests for exceptional relief. Some of the requests based on medical

⁷³ In Chapter Two reference was made to the success of a Tory candidate in the 1837 Parliamentary elections because of his criticism of the NPL. There was a tradition of strong political contention and dissension in the town, see C. Brent, *Georgian Lewes, 1714-1830: The Heyday of a County Town* (Lewes: 1993), 167-204.

⁷⁴ ESRO, *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, 12th February, 1838.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Due to the limited records available for West Firle it is not known whether this union provided relief on medical grounds although it is likely that it did given the evidence from the other four unions.

grounds were from able-bodied labourers and these may account for the slight increase in outdoor relief recipients by the late-1830s. Most requests due to ill health were agreed although some were turned down and only the workhouse offered. The support tended to range from five to seven shillings a week, which would have been approximately half a labourer's wages. It is possible that in the parishes in this union outdoor relief numbers were slightly higher under the NPL than under the OPL due to exceptional relief, but again it must be remembered that the payments on medical grounds tended to be short-term and could not be relied upon as any regular form of subsistence.⁷⁷

The Newhaven guardians were concerned that there should not be too much change following the PLAA. They wrote to the Commissioners stating that the act was beneficial and had a salutary effect but there should be no further material or substantial alterations.⁷⁸ The guardians challenged some of the Commissioners' directives. They asked to retain outdoor relief for large families or at least only admit part of the family of able-bodied labourers into the workhouse but the Commissioners insisted the whole family should be given indoor relief. The Earl of Chichester requested that the Board should pay for clothes for children of large families when they went out to service; the Commissioners reluctantly agreed to this which is reminiscent of their capitulation to the Earl of Liverpool in Uckfield. The guardians shared the concerns of the wealden officials in wanting to continue paying relief to non-resident paupers, especially widows and families, to enable them to seek work. Hawley argued that there was abundant work in the neighbouring town of Brighton and parishioners should not need support if they moved there. However, by 1840 the minutes list sixteen non-resident paupers being visited by the relieving officer indicating that the guardians successfully maintained this practice.⁷⁹ In Newhaven, and in all of the unions in the study, a number of OPL practices continued under the NPL which the PLAA allowed. Support was given to apprentices and loans were made to individuals to help them to get back to work. The new legislation also

⁷⁷ ESRO, Newhaven union board of guardians' minute book (Newhaven minutes), 1838-40, G/7/1a/3. King argued that medical welfare had become an increasingly important part of relief spending by the early-nineteenth century and it is apparent in this study that this continued during the NPL: S. King, *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor, 1750-1834* (Manchester: 2018). Hurren noted that the exceptions to the orders prohibiting outdoor relief led to increased diversity of practice. Concern over the increasing number of outdoor poor resulting in part from medical exceptions was a major cause of the Crusade against Out-Relief by the 1870s: Hurren, *Protesting*, 19.

⁷⁸ ESRO, Newhaven minutes, 1835-38, G/7/1a/2.

⁷⁹ ESRO, Newhaven minutes, 1838-40, G/7/1a/3.

encouraged officials to pursue the fathers of bastard children for payments, and extended families to support their relatives.

For the guardians in the new unions receiving directives from a centralised authority was a new experience and as has been shown they sometimes struggled to get to grips with a different system. In addition to concerns over having to deal with the Commissioners in London, local officials were uncertain about the respective responsibilities of parishes and the extra-parochial unions regarding aspects of relief. This reflects anxieties over threats to local autonomy and worries that individual parishes, notably those where the workhouses were located, were taking on an unfair financial burden. One example of this was the burial of inmates who died in the workhouse. In the Newhaven and Uckfield minutes there is an order for taking deceased parishioners back to their parishes for burial rather than being buried in the parish where the workhouse was located. King has identified similar discussions regarding burial practice between unions in Berkshire and questions whether this indicates a change in sentiment. On the other hand, he has found evidence that many officials under the NPL were still determined to bury people well. It was noted in Chapter Four that some of the Sussex overseers paid up to two pounds for funerals and there are examples of similar payments in the study union minutes.⁸⁰

This assessment of the guardians' approach to the new regulations in the PLAA has found that there was a general compliance with the Commissioners' directives but a reluctance to see too much change. There was some resistance, notably to ending all outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers, and also to moving whole families into the workhouse. Nevertheless, in the wealden parishes in particular where relief numbers had been high under the OPL, there appears to have been a considerable cut in the number of outdoor relief recipients. Williams also identified a severe reduction in the outdoor poor in Bedfordshire post-1835.⁸¹ However, intra-regional variations in eastern Sussex persisted during the early-NPL years with far less change in the number of outdoor poor in the downland parishes. The important question to ask is whether a reduction in outdoor poor led to an increase in indoor poor and attention now turns to the provision of indoor relief in the study parishes. In order to assess the deterrent nature of

⁸⁰ King, 'Rights, Duties', 270-275. References to burials are in the Newhaven and Uckfield union minutes: ESRO, 1835-38, G/7/1a/2; 1836-39, G/11/1a/1.

⁸¹ Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief', 32.

the NPL workhouses, the discussion will consider conditions for the indoor poor and the number and profile of workhouse inmates.

In the previous chapter intra-regional differences in the use of workhouses in eastern Sussex under the OPL were identified. The wealden parishes made more use of indoor relief than the downland parishes and therefore the introduction of a union workhouse may have had a bigger impact on parishioners in downland areas. Some NPL unions had to provide a new workhouse while others could choose to make use of existing buildings.⁸² The Commissioners' intention was that where possible several smaller workhouses should continue in use enabling separate accommodation for different categories of the poor: the able-bodied, the elderly and children. This was put into practice in Lewes where three OPL buildings were retained. In Hailsham the old Hellingly workhouse was developed to accommodate 270 inmates at a cost of £3,300 while the Hailsham workhouse was kept for the elderly until 1854 when they joined the children and able-bodied paupers in the Hellingly building. Uckfield, in contrast, built a large new establishment costing £7,500 which could accommodate up to 300 people. In the two downland unions of West Firle and Newhaven where little or no indoor provision existed under the OPL, new workhouses were built with space for up to 150 people at a cost of £2,900 and £3,300 respectively.⁸³

Within the traditional narrative of workhouses as places that were to be feared, the austere visual appearance of the buildings is often cited. Some biographers discuss the apprehension they felt when approaching the union workhouse. John Rowlands referred to St Asaph's workhouse as, 'a great building with iron gates and numerous windows'. The wards were enclosed by 'high walls' and the doors were 'locked and barred'.⁸⁴ In an article by the *Daily Dispatch* the enlarged Hellingly workhouse was described as, 'the Bastille of the Hailsham

⁸² Brundage identified a similar situation in Northamptonshire where the introduction of a workhouse in parishes used only to small 'poorhouses' caused a more 'drastic transformation' instilling terror in many parishioners: Brundage, 'The English Poor Law', 412.

⁸³ This range in workhouse sizes in eastern Sussex was similar to the range in Hertfordshire; Rothery, 'The Implementation'. However, even the larger wealden institutions were far smaller than some urban buildings such as St George in the East in London which could accommodate 770 inmates by 1860: P. Higginbotham, *Workhouses of London and the South East* (Stroud: 2019), 105. The Webbs argued that building one workhouse was, 'a flagrant departure from the policy of 1834'; S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, 57. The cost of new or altered workhouses ranged from £2,000 to £10,000 nationally. There were exceptions such as Lambeth which allocated over £23,000; Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 51.

⁸⁴ P. Higginbotham, *Voices From the Workhouse* (Stroud: 2012), 34.

union... surrounded by high walls ...surmounted with cast-iron'.⁸⁵ However, this article was written in 1838 when there was much criticism of the NPL and it is possible that it is an example of anti-poor law propoganda. The frontage of the NPL establishments in the study unions might well be described as austere, see figures 5.1-5.4 below. There is a stark contrast between the Uckfield union workhouse and the Uckfield old poor house in Figure 5.5. At the same time it must be remembered that the NPL buildings were designed to accommodate large numbers of people and it may have been difficult to avoid an institutional appearance.

Figure 5.1 Hellingly workhouse 1908. (workhouses.org.uk)



Figure 5.2 West Firlie workhouse (workhouses.org.uk)



An early 1900s view of the West Firlie Union workhouse.

⁸⁵ Longmate, *The Workhouse*, 69-70.

Figure 5.3 A late-twentieth century view of the Newhaven workhouse (workhouses.org.uk)



Figure 5.4 Uckfield Union workhouse in the 1970s (workhouses.org.uk)



Figure 5.5 A late-twentieth century view of the Uckfield Old Poor Law workhouse (workhouses.org.uk)



Charlotte Newman has discussed the impact of institutional architecture on pauper identity and experience in her Shropshire study. The NPL workhouses catered for several categories of

people and her work supports the view that the experience of each category could vary. In the NPL buildings the indoor poor would have been aware of the different conditions that staff and some categories of pauper were expected to live in; different levels of physical comfort reflected 'deservingness'. For example, the elderly often had better accommodation than the able-bodied while vagrants had the least attractive spaces.⁸⁶

Sources available for this study provide limited information on conditions in the five union workhouses. As Newman suggests, categories of paupers may have been treated differently and therefore the elderly, able-bodied and children are discussed separately. Beginning with the over-60s, there is evidence that the much criticised practice of parting elderly married couples was not applied in all of the unions. In the new Uckfield workhouse there were five apartments for aged couples and in the All Saints workhouse in Lewes, which had been allocated to the elderly poor, there was also provision for three couples to live in separate accommodation. As already noted, Hailsham retained a building specifically for the elderly until the 1850s. There is no information on how the different categories of paupers were accommodated in the West Fittleton union, but males and females were to be kept separate at all times (other than under 7s) in the new Newhaven workhouse and this presumably included the elderly. Thus conditions for indoor paupers could have varied intra-regionally based on the policy of the guardians as well as the form of accommodation provided.

Able-bodied indoor poor were expected to carry out some form of labour. There is little information in the records for the study unions on women's work in the workhouses but there are indications in the minutes for two of the unions that the men objected to the employment they were given. In the Hailsham OPL workhouse men had been paid small sums of money for their work but this ended after 1834.⁸⁷ There are references in the Hailsham union minutes to men in the Hellingly workhouse protesting because they were expected to grind grain for their bread. The Lewes union minutes also record incidents when the adult male paupers refused to work. They were set to crushing bones and when they asked for additional food due to the arduous nature of the work their request was turned down and they went on strike. It is not

⁸⁶ Newman suggests that in the Shropshire workhouse the able-bodied received greater surveillance than the elderly: C. Newman, 'An archaeology of poverty: architectural innovation and pauper experience at Madeley Union Workhouse, Shropshire', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, (2013), 359-377.

⁸⁷ It is not clear in the records how much the indoor poor were paid; however, in the Lewes OPL workhouse the pay for boys was a few pence (see below). Crowther argues that workhouse pay was discouraged under the NPL as it might discourage paupers from seeking work; Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 197.

possible to know the full circumstances from the records and it must be remembered that tasks given to the outdoor poor under the OPL, which included breaking stones, could also have involved very hard work. In the other union workhouses men were employed in similar tasks including working mills and in West Firle bone crushing is recorded, although there is no information on the paupers' reaction to this work.

Children were possibly the most vulnerable of the indoor poor as they had no choice over whether they went into the workhouse or when they might leave. Those with able-bodied parents were often temporary residents while orphans were likely to be there longer-term. Older children were often expected to work. There tends to be more information in the records about boys' work which included gardening in the Hailsham union workhouse, and making stockings and hats in the Uckfield and Lewes workhouses. Boys had clearly carried out some form of work prior to 1834 in the St John Sub Castro OPL workhouse in Lewes as their pay of 2d. per shilling was discontinued when the new union was formed. The master of the NPL workhouse also had some success in arranging apprenticeships.⁸⁸ There is mention of boys' labour in the West Firle union but the Newhaven records do not indicate whether or not there was employment for children. One aim of providing work was to enable young people to have a trade and not be reliant on relief as adults. This is arguably an example of a positive aspect of indoor relief and indicates that workhouses could have a number of purposes, not solely that of deterrence.

Schooling was provided in the NPL workhouses but the standard may have varied between neighbouring unions.⁸⁹ For example, in the early years of the NPL the indoor poor in West Firle probably had a limited education as Tufnell was concerned about the quality of teaching which was delivered by someone who was virtually a pauper himself. Given Ellman's views on educating girls discussed above, the standard of education in the workhouse may not have been a priority for the guardians. Tufnell also noted that there were very few children in the

⁸⁸ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1835-39, G/6/1a/1. Crowther argued that workhouse pay was discouraged under the NPL as it might discourage paupers from seeking work; Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 197.

⁸⁹ Schooling under the OPL in workhouses had varied but was often minimal. The Poor Law Commissioners aimed to improve workhouse education by providing a minimum of three hours a day in the three Rs and religion. However, this was often difficult to achieve in the early years of the NPL particularly in smaller rural workhouses where there were few children and guardians were reluctant to spend money on teachers' salaries. The situation improved in 1846 when there was a central government fund to pay teachers. See, F. Duke, 'Pauper Education' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law*, 67-86.

West Firlle workhouse to be schooled. In contrast children in the Newhaven workhouse may have fared better as the Earl of Chichester took a particular interest in their schooling and supervised the provision of books. However, the number of pupils would have been small and, as will be seen in the following chapter, by the 1840s the children were going out of the workhouse to the local school.

Tomkins has pointed out that the experience of the indoor poor could often depend on personalities, both of the staff and also other paupers.⁹⁰ This is highlighted by a reference in the Uckfield guardians' minutes to the assault on two boys by an adult inmate while the master of the Cliffe workhouse was brought before the guardians for treating people roughly.⁹¹ Paupers could send complaints to either the guardians or the Poor Law Commission and workhouse visiting committees were set up in all of the unions in this study. The Boards of Guardians' Minute Books for the 1830s indicate that complaints were investigated and on occasion staff or inmates were reprimanded. Yet children probably depended on other inmates to voice concern over their treatment and the sense of pauper agency noted by Jones and King may have been at a very early stage in workhouses during the late-1830s.⁹² There are quite regular references in the records to children running away from the workhouse in each of the unions which could be seen as a further example of their vulnerability as escape may have been a last resort. The union minutes also record incidents when adults scaled the workhouse walls. On the other hand there may have been a number of reasons why both adults and children left, including stealing workhouse property. Jones, King and Thompson have found several examples of the indoor poor running away in order to take the workhouse clothing.⁹³

It is evident from the records that the NPL workhouses were run according to strict regulations provided by the Poor Law Commissioners. The daily timetable, working hours and diet were stipulated in various orders and the boards of guardians' minute books and correspondence with the Central Authority during the 1830s indicate that these orders were implemented by

⁹⁰ A. Tomkins, 'Poor Law Institutions through Working-Class Eyes: Autobiography, Emotion, and Family Context, 1834-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 60 (2021), 285-309.

⁹¹ The accused in the Uckfield workhouse was taken before the magistrates indicating that the boys' complaint was taken seriously: ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1836-39, G/11/1a/1; Lewes minutes, 1835-39, G/6/1a/1.

⁹² Jones and King discuss how workhouse inmates were navigating, and challenging, workhouse life in the middle and later decades of the NPL. They also discuss the public's concern regarding workhouse conditions and the need for improvement. This developed as the NPL became more established in the mid to later nineteenth century, Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*.

⁹³ Jones, King and Thompson, 'Clothing the New Poor Law Workhouse'.

officials. While some intra-regional differences in the provision of indoor relief have been identified in the discussion so far, these mainly relate to the number of workhouses in use, and whether they were new buildings. However, the running of the institutions arguably reflected a considerable degree of uniformity across the unions in this study. Samantha Williams has suggested that the strict regime of workhouses was a means in itself of enforcing discipline.⁹⁴ In addition, the Commissioners produced a list of punishments should paupers challenge regulations and the authority of staff, and Williams argues that the full range were implemented in unions. She disagrees with King who has suggested that the workhouse masters rarely used all forms of discipline available to them as they were fearful of bad publicity in the press.⁹⁵ In the eastern Sussex workhouses the range of recommended punishments were implemented including a reduced diet of bread and water, placement in a refractory ward and sending paupers before a magistrate, although the latter was used as a last resort. The union minutes record incidents when paupers were reprimanded although some infractions may have gone unpunished and therefore unrecorded in which case it is possible that workhouse masters were concerned to minimise any bad publicity.⁹⁶

While this assessment of indoor relief in eastern Sussex has identified references in union records to incidents of harsh treatment and to individuals running away from the workhouses, there are also examples of acts of kindness from relief officials. Although the NPL led to the transfer of many powers from the parish to a union, relief decisions could still be made by individual guardians who represented their parishes and within the formulaic structure of the union records there are hints of humane actions on behalf of the officials. The Hailsham union sent several indoor paupers to stay by the sea in Seaford for their health. In the Newhaven Minutes there is a rare reference to a personal relationship between an official and a relief recipient: Edward Moon was allowed out of the workhouse as his 'venerable old master Charles Saxby' had invited him to his house. The Saxby family were farmers, overseers and

⁹⁴ S. Williams, 'Paupers Behaving Badly: Punishment in the Victorian Workhouse', *Journal of British Studies*, (2020), 764-792; Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 195.

⁹⁵ Punishments recommended by the Poor Law Commissioners included restricting the diet, 24 hour solitary confinement in a refractory cell, and for more serious or repeat offences being sent before a magistrate: *First annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, Appendix A*, PP 1835, C.500. Williams, 'Paupers Behaving Badly'. King argued that workhouse administrators were subject to press scrutiny and therefore were worried that they might be accused of ill-treating paupers: S. King, 'Thinking and Rethinking the New Poor Law', *Local Population Studies*, (2017), 17.

⁹⁶ There are examples of sending children and adults to the magistrate in the Newhaven, Hailsham and Lewes union minutes. ESRO, 1835-38, G/7/1a/2; 1836-38, G/5/1a/1; 1835-39, G/6/1a/1.

guardians based in Rodmell and Charles Saxby represented Rodmell parish as a guardian. Karel Williams argues that it is not possible to measure whether relief officials acted out of 'humanity' or self-interest. Certainly the records can only offer tenuous indicators, but the Sussex evidence suggests that it was possible for officials and the poor to maintain a personal relationship under the NPL, particularly in the smaller unions.⁹⁷

Considering conditions in the NPL workhouses is one way of assessing whether they may have been viewed by the poor as a deterrent. Comparing how many people were in the workhouses at the end of the OPL with indoor populations during the early years of the NPL might also indicate whether or not paupers were reluctant to make use of this form of relief. The number of people from each parish in a workhouse during the final decades of the OPL and the first years of the NPL is shown in Table 5.3 below.⁹⁸ There is only a slight increase in people receiving indoor relief in the Lewes and wealden parishes after 1834, while the figures in the new downland workhouses are also small. Significantly the number of indoor poor does not appear to reflect the reduction in outdoor poor noted above. It is quite possible that people saw the workhouses as a deterrent and were reluctant to use them if they could avoid it. There are references in the union minutes to individuals turning down the 'offer of the house'. At the same time, there are records of the elderly poor asking the relieving officer or the guardians whether they could go into the house. This may well have been because they were no longer able to subsist on their meagre relief pensions as they became increasingly frail or they lacked family support.

⁹⁷ ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1840-42, G/5/1a/3; Newhaven minutes, 1838-40, G/7/1a/3. Karel Williams, *From Pauperism*, 65.

⁹⁸ The data for 1832 comes from the 1832 enquiries and only refers to one point in time in the summer when numbers may have been at their lowest. The data for the New Poor Law years includes a range of numbers covering the summer and winter.

Table 5.3 Number of indoor poor in the study parishes during the Old and New Poor Laws. The data for the NPL years comes from parish and union ledgers⁹⁹

Parish	Population in 1831	1803 HCPP Adults	1832 HCPP Adults and children	1836 Adults and Children	1837 Adults and Children	1838 Adults and Children	1839 Adults and Children
Hailsham W	1445	31	24	37	45-47		
Laughton W	804	9	10-20	10	13-14		
Chiddingly W	902	21	22	37	17-34		
Hellingly W	1504	0	42	79	41-86		
Uckfield W	1261	15	36	14			
Rotherfield W	3097	27	32	42			
East Hoathly W	505	0	No info	1			
Waldron W	997	29	29	30			
Newhaven D	904	0	No w/h	5-13	6-11	6-7	8-20
Rottingdean D	880	6	No w/h	4-7	9-12	10-16	14-18
Piddinghoe D	231	0	No w/h	5-6	2-4	2-8	3-9
Rodmell D	350	0	No info	15-23	15-26	14-18	15-24
Alciston D	266	0	No w/h	4-8	7-17	7-18	8-11
Glynde D	276	0	No w/h	0	0	2	3
Berwick D	203	0	18	2-5	6-12	5-19	3-11
Lewes	2421	0	29	22-52	19-29	34-58	

In addition to considering how many people were making use of indoor relief under the NPL, it is also important to look at their profile and this is shown in Table 5.4 below. Data is given for six parishes that have extant admission and discharge registers for 1841. While this is slightly beyond the time scale for this chapter, these workhouse records have not survived for the 1830s. The list of indoor poor in the 1831 census for Chiddingly is shown in brackets to enable a comparison to be made between the Old and New Poor law periods.¹⁰⁰ While the sample is very small, there appears to have been an increase in the number of able-bodied men after the NPL as anticipated by the Commissioners. The highest proportion of indoor poor were children under the Old and New Poor Laws but relatively few elderly people were in the workhouses in either period. In Lewes the able-bodied male inmates during the NPL are likely to have been

⁹⁹ *Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of the poor in England*, PP 1803-4, C.175; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners, 1834*. The figures in the ledgers show the highest and lowest quarterly number. The parish and union ledgers are listed in the bibliography.

¹⁰⁰ ESRO, Hailsham union admission and discharge registers, 1835-43, G4/14/1-4; Newhaven union admission and discharge registers, 1836-46, G/7/14/1. The data for Lewes is recorded in the minutes: Lewes minutes, 1839-43, G/6/1a/2. The number of people in the OPL workhouse in Chiddingly in Table 5.5 only refers to one point in time whereas the NPL data represents all inmates over a year.

single as there is only one able-bodied woman. It was noted in Chapter Four that proportionately more single men received poor relief in the town.¹⁰¹

Table 5.4 Profile of the indoor poor for six of the study parishes in 1841¹⁰²

Parish	Population in 1841	Number of parishioners over 60	Elderly (over 60) and infirm	Able-bodied men 16-60	Able-bodied women 16-60	Children	Non-resident and vagrants
Chiddingly W	930	58	6 (4)	14 (1)	9 (2)	18 (10)	
Newhaven D	1265	77	14	11	12	15	
Rodmell D	360	22	5	5	7	12	
Rottingdean D	988	61	2	1	3	8	
Piddinghoe D	263	7	2	2	2	3	
Lewes St John Sub Castro	2502	153	14	13	1	6	3

There are only a few studies which include a breakdown of the profile of workhouse populations during either the 1830s or 1840s and they tend to give figures for the whole union rather than individual parishes in the unions. In Chapter Two the profile of the indoor poor in the Bridge union in Kent and in workhouses in the Hertfordshire unions was compared and it was apparent that there was a higher proportion of children in the rural Kent workhouse. The situation in the Sussex workhouses was similar to that of Kent as a high number of the indoor poor in Sussex were children. Rothery suggests that there may have been fewer children in the Hertfordshire workhouses as employment was available in the straw-plaiting industry.¹⁰³ It was argued in Chapter Four that local economies could affect the numbers and profile of relief recipients. Driver gives a breakdown of the indoor poor in separate parishes in Huddersfield for 1841 where children only made up one quarter to one third of the inmates. It is likely that the high proportion of children in the largely rural Sussex parishes and in rural Kent reflects the

¹⁰¹ Boyer found that there were far more elderly men than elderly women in workhouses in his study of the late-nineteenth century and this is supported by the Sussex evidence discussed in the following chapter. Elderly women were more likely to be supported by their children as they could offer help such as child care, washing or nursing. G. Boyer, “‘Work for their prime, the workhouse for their age’: Old Age and Pauperism in Victorian England”, *Social Science History*, (2016), 3-32.

¹⁰² Data in Table 5.4 is taken from the Hailsham and Newhaven unions’ admission and discharge registers and the Lewes union board of guardians’ minute book listed in the bibliography.

¹⁰³ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 233; Goose, ‘Workhouse Populations’; Rothery, ‘The Implementation’, 299, 486.

problems that agricultural labourers experienced in supporting large families when employment was often temporary.¹⁰⁴

When considering the number and profile of the indoor poor it is important to stress that the adult poor often made use of indoor relief on a temporary basis going in and out of the workhouse for a few days or a few weeks on several occasions. Indeed this can make it difficult to gain an accurate number of inmates. The admission and discharge registers, which are available for the Hailsham and Newhaven unions, indicate that several people used the workhouse on a short-term basis, notably the able-bodied. The reason cited for accepting indoor support was often unemployment or illness, particularly in the winter months. This suggests that the workhouses offered a 'safety net' to the poor and may have been regarded as a useful resource and part of their 'make-shift economy'.¹⁰⁵ Crowther and Digby have both referred to a high number of people using indoor support in this way in their respective studies of Kent and Norfolk.¹⁰⁶

This discussion of indoor relief has found indications that aspects of life in the NPL workhouses may have been harsh and acted as a deterrent to some paupers. Work could be hard, there was a rigid regime and the indoor poor could experience bullying or harassment from staff or other residents. On the other hand there were opportunities for children to receive training and workhouses provided a form of refuge in times of destitution. Without access to personal accounts of indoor life any assessment of the 'experience' of workhouse conditions remain largely conjecture. On the other hand the low uptake of indoor relief in the new workhouses when outdoor support was restricted does suggest that paupers were not keen to enter the institutions. The number of people in the workhouses in this study accords with King's finding that under the NPL indoor relief was, 'very much the exception for most places and at most times.'¹⁰⁷ Cuts in the size of the outdoor lists and only a small increase in indoor numbers suggest that there were many people in the study unions who were no longer being supported under the NPL and one of the aims of the Poor Law Commissioners, the reduction in spending

¹⁰⁴ Driver, *Power and Pauperism*, 150.

¹⁰⁵ Hanly argued that the option of the workhouse was one form of makeshift economy that the poor were not keen to use: M. Hanly, 'The economy of makeshifts and the role of the poor law: a game of chance?' in, S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor In England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester: 2003), 96.

¹⁰⁶ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 233; Digby, *Pauper Palaces*, 152.

¹⁰⁷ King, 'Rights, Duties', 264.

on relief, may have been achieved. Therefore focus now needs to turn to expenditure in the study unions to establish whether this was the case.

Figure 5.6 Annual parish expenditure on relief prior to, and following, the PLAA¹⁰⁸

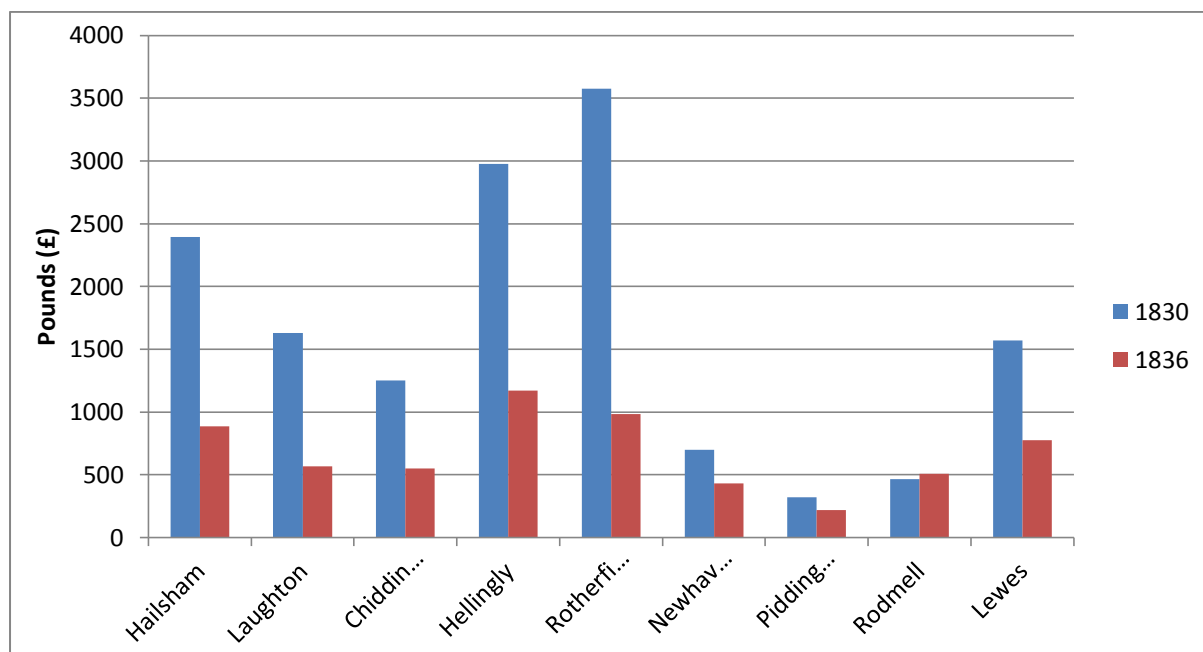


Figure 5.6 above compares annual expenditure in 1830 towards the end of the OPL with annual expenditure in 1836 at the beginning of the NPL for parishes with available records.¹⁰⁹ The data shows that there was a dramatic cut in spending following the NPL in the wealden parishes and in the town of Lewes it was halved, although the reduction was not as severe as in the Weald. It was stated above that there did not appear to be a notable change in the number of relief recipients in Lewes after 1834. However, the number of regular pensioners fell which could explain the drop in expenditure. Compared with the Weald and Lewes, there was a far smaller cut in spending in the downland parishes where the number of people in receipt of poor relief and relative expenditure was low before 1834. Figure 5.6 shows a slight increase in Rodmell in 1836. There was no workhouse in this parish under the OPL and therefore the introduction of the new Newhaven union workhouse may have led to a rise in costs to the parish.¹¹⁰ This is

¹⁰⁸ Data in Figure 5.6 is taken from parish and union ledgers listed in the bibliography.

¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately Feinstein's inflation index is not available for the NPL period and therefore inflation has not been taken into account in Chapters Five and Six. The parishes that joined the West Fille union have not been included as there are gaps in the ledgers.

¹¹⁰ The cost of the new workhouses was met by selling off parish properties and taking out a government loan which could be paid off over ten to twenty years. Parishes managed to meet this cost and still make considerable cuts.

possibly the first study to demonstrate the value of using local records to assess expenditure. The results show that there could be a nuanced picture between parishes within unions and intra-regionally between unions. King found that poor relief within unions was by no means uniform during the first years of the NPL and this is supported by the Sussex evidence.¹¹¹

Figures for Sussex fit the national picture of cuts in poor relief expenditure following the passing of the NPL. In England and Wales overall spending on the poor fell by more than one third between 1830-33 and 1840-43 despite an increase in the population of two million.¹¹² In other Sussex unions and in south-eastern counties, including Kent and Essex, a similar pattern of reduction in spending on relief is apparent in the Poor Law Commissioners' annual reports published between 1835 and 1838.¹¹³ Other studies have shown the same picture for Midland counties. In the Ampthill union in Bedfordshire spending fell from an average of £14,602 in the three years prior to the NPL to £9,040 by 1837. Within that period annual costs within the whole county halved. Brundage found that in twelve unions in Northamptonshire expenditure dropped from £140,179 in 1834 to £83,171 in 1840, the lowest figure was in 1837 at £74,072. Rothery also discussed cuts in spending in Hertfordshire which fell to their lowest point in 1837 before a gradual rise in the 1840s. However, while there was an increase in spending in Hertfordshire by the 1840s it did not reach the high level of 1834.¹¹⁴

A drop in expenditure on relief following the introduction of the NPL was achieved in the study parishes by reducing regular payments including rent, flour allowances and the number of weekly pensions. Able-bodied labourers in particular were affected by these cuts. It has been possible to identify a number of individuals whose names appear in the relief lists under the Old and New Poor Laws so that the impact of the new regulations on parishioners can be assessed.¹¹⁵ In the wealden parish of Chiddingly Richard Jenner was a pauper in years between the 1820s and 1840s. In the 1821 census Jenner was recorded as a servant aged 19. He began to receive temporary relief in 1825 when he was out of work. By 1828 he had a regular flour

¹¹¹ King, 'Rights, Duties and Practice', 290.

¹¹² Kidd, *State, Society*, 10.

¹¹³ Several parishes forming the Westhampnett union in West Sussex also witnessed a halving of expenditure by 1838. Figures for Sussex, Kent and Essex can be seen in: *First annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, Appendix A, 1835; Fourth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, Appendix D, PP 1838, C.147.*

¹¹⁴ Williams, 'Earnings, Poor Relief', 24; Brundage, 'The English Poor law', 411; Rothery, 'The Implementation', 278.

¹¹⁵ Duplicate names make it difficult to be certain that the names represent the same person but ages and family details match up.

allowance which continued until the early-1830s when he had a family with 3 children (triplets). In 1834 he received a weekly payment of 2s. 6d. By 1841 he had seven children and he was given flour and mutton for two or three weeks on two separate occasions due to family illness. In 1842 he was again supported on two occasions, for his wife's confinement and, in December, for one week as he had no work and there was no room in the workhouse. While Jenner's personal circumstances may have changed across this period, it does appear that under the OPL he received regular support yet after 1834 he was only given outdoor relief in times of illness for very short periods of time.¹¹⁶

In the downland parish of Newhaven the name of James Pryor, a labourer, appears in both the Old and New Poor Law records. Under the OPL during the years 1821-1825, when records are available, Pryor had a regular weekly payment of flour and clothes for his children, and his rent paid until September 1821 when the Select Vestry decided to end all payments of rent (a decision which was later revoked). Pryor was also temporarily employed on the roads for a payment of 10s. a week. However, in 1839 under the NPL Pryor, now aged sixty-seven, and his wife and 24 year old daughter, were given an order for the workhouse. It is not possible to establish whether they took up the offer but they were no longer there in 1841 when Pryor was ill and he and his wife were given a one off payment of six shillings.¹¹⁷ Again Pryor's personal situation may have changed by the late-1830s but it does appear that more regular support was available under the OPL.

Conclusion

Case studies can only offer a glimpse into the lives of paupers following the introduction of the NPL. However, the Sussex relief records provide information on the impact of the PLAA on relief practices during the 1830s and it is now possible to draw some conclusions to the questions raised at the start of this chapter. Turning firstly to how relief officials dealt with the new legislation and whether it affected their relationship with the poor, initial reaction to the new legislation varied in eastern Sussex. Unions with members of the aristocracy on the boards of guardians, notably in the downland areas, appeared to be the most receptive while greater opposition was initially shown by the guardians in parts of the Weald and in particular the town

¹¹⁶ ESRO, Chiddingly Census, 1821, LIB/503580; Chiddingly Census, 1831, PAR292/37/3; Chiddingly overseers' accounts, 1817-35, P292/8/2-4; Hailsham minutes, 1840-43, G/5/1a/3-4.

¹¹⁷ ESRO, Newhaven ledgers, 1821-27, P426/1/2; Newhaven minutes, 1838-42, G/7/1a/3-4

of Lewes. The new laws were unpopular with many parishioners and resistance was evident in Sussex and in other areas of the southeast.

Yet, once the new unions were set up, the guardians complied with most, although not all, of the regulations sent from the centralised authority. In particular they wanted to continue to provide outdoor relief for some people and they were not keen on sending all members of a family into the workhouse. Officials wished to retain local control to the extent that they were on occasion reluctant to combine with other parishes. The records show that the majority of the Sussex guardians were farmers, although in the town of Lewes a wide range of occupations were represented on the union board. Many of the guardians had acted as overseers under the OPL and there was therefore a considerable degree of consistency in personnel. This would have enabled them to retain a closer connection with relief recipients as both their employers and former overseers, particularly in the smaller downland unions. While it is difficult to assess the sentiment shown towards the poor from the records, there are examples of acts of kindness on behalf of officials towards the poor.¹¹⁸

With regard to the reduction in the size of the outdoor relief lists after 1834, there is little question in the historiography that the number of people, in particular able-bodied labourers, receiving this form of relief was reduced following the PLAA. At the same time, relief officials were able to make use of exceptions to the prohibitory orders to provide short-term support for illness or emergencies. This was also the situation in the Sussex unions. While the medical support provided as exceptional relief would have been of value to the poor, the majority in this Sussex study are likely to have been worse off after 1834. Many people who received regular relief under the OPL lost that support under the NPL. Payments of rent, child allowances or flour allowances were replaced with one off payments for one or two weeks when there was illness in a household which may well have led to increased hardship for many people. The impact on the poor was greater in wealden parishes than in downland parishes as far more people were supported in the Weald under the OPL. In some of the downland parishes it is possible that, as the guardians made use of the exceptions to the prohibitory orders and offered support for illness, there was a slight increase in outdoor relief provision after 1834.

¹¹⁸ In his study of Northamptonshire where the NPL led to a far stricter relief system, Brundage is able to quote examples of acts of kindness shown by the guardians: Brundage, 'The English Poor Law', 416.

A third question concerned the use of a deterrent workhouse following the PLAA. In Sussex there were intra-regional differences in workhouse provision under the OPL and therefore the impact of introducing new or enlarged workhouses varied across parishes. Under the NPL intra-regional variations in workhouse provision continued as some unions made use of several buildings while others built one new workhouse. The new or enlarged buildings appear austere and were visually very different from the old workhouses. It is difficult to say whether they were deliberately built to look uninviting, their function was to accommodate large numbers of people at low cost. However, in many respects the provision of indoor relief was one aspect of the NPL that was fairly uniform in areas where the deterrent workhouse was adopted soon after 1834. In Sussex and in other south-eastern counties the regulations issued by the Poor Law Commissioners led to similar indoor regimes.

Data for Sussex confirms findings from other rural studies that workhouse numbers did not greatly increase following the PLAA, although in the wealden unions with larger populations, capacity was quickly reached.¹¹⁹ The profile of the indoor poor during the late-1830s in Sussex was similar to that in other rural south-eastern workhouses with a high number of children. There was a slight change following 1834 with more able-bodied inmates. It is not possible to say conclusively that the workhouses acted as a deterrent in the early years of the NPL. The experience of the indoor poor could be dependent on individual personalities of both other inmates and staff. The work regime appeared hard and incidents of bullying and harassment are evident in the records. Given the low uptake of indoor relief and the short-term stay of many adults it is likely that most people were not keen to make use of this form of relief unless close to destitution. Yet, these institutions were a safety net and could provide children in particular with some training to enable them to become independent.

The reduction in outdoor relief and the small numbers of indoor poor led to a cut in expenditure on relief in Sussex during the late-1830s. In some of the wealden unions and Lewes expenditure was halved which fitted the national picture. However, the extent of reduction varied intra-regionally and was much lower in the downland unions where relief numbers had been small prior to 1834. Despite continuity in personnel and individual acts of kindness from relief officials, this discussion indicates that the poor experienced a harsher system during the

¹¹⁹ Numbers tended to be higher in urban workhouses under both the Old and New Poor Laws, see: Higginbotham, *Workhouses of London*.

first years of the NPL. Using in-depth local records has revealed a more nuanced intra-regional picture than can be obtained from government records alone. In the following chapter local relief records are further analysed to examine the provision of relief in Sussex during the 1840s and 1850s to assess whether there were further changes as the new regulations became established. Where possible, comparisons are made with other regions, although this is not easy as so few studies have been carried out into relief during those two decades.

Chapter Six

The New Poor Law during the 1840s and 1850s in eastern Sussex.

Introduction

In the previous chapter intra-regional variations in the early impact of the NPL on eastern Sussex parishes were clearly identified. High spending parishes under the OPL witnessed far greater reductions in expenditure and in the number of people receiving relief. At the same time some consistency was noted between the NPL unions as use was made of a deterrent workhouse, although the number of inmates from each parish was relatively low both absolutely and compared to other union-types. This chapter assesses the provision of poor relief between 1840 and 1860 once the NPL had become established in the study parishes. Steven King and Anne Digby have suggested that officials may have taken a more relaxed approach by the 1840s as they became used to the regulations which could have resulted in an increase in the number of people being supported. The aim of the following discussion is to assess whether there is evidence of a more uniform system in the study unions and to set Sussex more clearly within a national picture for these years.

Focus on able-bodied labourers, which was a feature of the previous chapters, continues in Chapter Six. Able-bodied men did not completely disappear from the outdoor relief records in the study parishes during the late-1830s as they were able to obtain support due to exceptions under the prohibitory orders.¹ The sources covering the 1840s and 1850s include information on the provision of exceptional relief making it possible to contribute to the long-standing debate over outdoor relief to able-bodied men under the NPL. Consideration is also given to the profile of the indoor poor and in particular the presence of able-bodied men in the workhouses. The role of relief officials and their relationship with the Central Commission continues to be explored in this chapter.²

The poor law during the mid-nineteenth century has received even less attention in the literature than the 1830s. There is general consensus within the historiography based

¹ As noted in the previous chapter, short-term support was still possible due to exceptions under the prohibitory orders issued by the Poor Law Commission after 1834.

² Records used for this period in Sussex include union ledgers, board of guardians' minute books and workhouse admission and discharge registers. Coverage for each union varies, as is normal for any set of county NPL unions in England and Wales.

predominantly on government sources that in the southeast most relief continued to be provided out of the workhouse.³ Dispute over the extent of outdoor relief given to able-bodied men in this period continues with Karel Williams arguing that during the twenty years following 1834, 'a line of exclusion was drawn against able-bodied men.' He maintains that a 'negligible' number of men were supported due to unemployment, although he concedes that a 'modest' number of men received exceptional relief under the prohibitory orders.⁴ Studies such as those by Digby, and William Apfel and Peter Dunkley, which were discussed in the previous chapter, indicate that the extent of outdoor relief to able-bodied men under the NPL varied regionally. Digby argues that there was a certain continuity with the OPL in East Anglia in the 1840s and 1850s where relief may have been distributed by guardians 'ostensibly' for illness in order to retain men during times of unemployment.⁵ Sarah Bradley's recent study of the Bromsgrove poor law union during the 1840s adds weight to the suggestion that guardians made use of illness in the family to provide support in times of crisis. In contrast Apfel and Dunkley maintain that in Bedfordshire the severe reduction in outdoor relief to able-bodied men evident in the late-1830s continued into the 1840s.⁶

Other studies which have touched on the 1840s include King's work on the New Forest which identified a change in the profile of outdoor relief recipients with fewer elderly men, young widows and able-bodied men. Lynn Hollen Lees, in a study of six home-counties, found that able-bodied men, in particular those with families, continued to apply to the NPL relief system and some were given outdoor relief. She pointed out that not all applicants were recorded in the data sent by guardians to the Central Commission. This may have been deliberate on the

³ King found that by the end of 1850 there were fewer workhouse inmates as a percentage of the pauper population than in 1803 in his study of the New Forest: S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000), 230. Digby noted the high ratio of outdoor to indoor relief and the emptiness of workhouses in rural areas under the NPL: A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: 1976), 170. Hollen Lees discussed the national picture noting that, 'the vast majority of paupers received aid outside institutions': L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: 1998), 185.

⁴ K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: 1981), 74, 75. Williams implied that many of the men receiving this type of support were from agricultural areas as he notes that industrial workers cannot have been receiving this form of relief.

⁵ Exceptional relief could be given in cases of illness to the individual or their family and for funerals. However, Digby notes that the Central Authority was not sufficiently well staffed to ensure that guardians complied with the Prohibitory Order; rural unions exploited the exceptions in the Order, notably those allowing relief due to illness within families: Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', 157.

⁶ S. Bradley, 'Welcoming the New Poor Law: The Bromsgrove Poor Law Union, 1836-1847', *Family and Community History*, 22 (2019); W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Laws: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), 37-68.

part of the local officials or the result of some temporary applicants not being recorded.⁷ Among the few studies that have been carried out into mid-nineteenth century workhouse populations, there is agreement that the indoor poor formed a minority of all relief recipients. In the previous chapter it was noted that there was some consistency in the profile of inmates during the late-1830s in rural counties in the southeast and studies on indoor relief show that this was also the case in the 1840s and 1850s. A high percentage of the indoor poor were children; there were relatively more elderly men than women; and more single men than men with families. Most long-term residents in the workhouse were the elderly and children. The able-bodied indoor poor in particular tended to go in and out of the workhouse for short spells of time, often a few days or weeks.⁸

With reference to the relationship between guardians and Commissioners, Derek Fraser has suggested that, while during the early stages of the NPL the Central Commission seemed to display indifference to the condition of the paupers, this situation changed as men from the middle ranks of bureaucracy engaged in battles with sometimes parsimonious guardians in an effort to improve standards, notably in the workhouses. Dunkley has also argued that the Poor Law Commissioners tried to ensure that adequate measures were in place to support the poor in Durham during the 1840s where the local guardians were implementing stringent measures. There is some evidence to support the notion that representatives from the Central Authority aimed to improve conditions in at least one of the Sussex unions during the 1840s and 1850s and this will be discussed below.⁹

The paucity of research covering the mid-nineteenth century and the suggestion that government reports may not have been comprehensive serves to emphasise the need for studies which can provide a detailed assessment of the relief system in several parishes using local as well as government records. The discussion below begins by considering the outdoor poor followed by the number and profile of the indoor poor and overall expenditure on relief. A section on local officials assesses whether the continuity in personnel on the boards of

⁷ King, *Poverty and welfare*; Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 181.

⁸ M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: The history of an English social institution* (London: 1981); N. Goose, 'Workhouse Populations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: the case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999), 52-69; A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, 'The Populations of Two Hampshire Workhouses, 1851-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998), 38-53; K. Rothery, 'The implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire c.1830-1847, (Unpublished thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016).

⁹ D. Fraser, 'Introduction' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law*, 19, 20; P. Dunkley, 'The "Hungry Forties" and the New Poor Law: A Case Study', *The Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 245.

guardians noted in both Chapter Four on the OPL and Chapter Five on the early years of the NPL continued during the 1840s and 1850s. The work of the guardians and their relationship with the Poor Law Commission, and from 1847 the Poor Law Board, is then explored. In the previous chapter conditions in NPL workhouses were considered in the section on indoor relief, in this chapter they are covered in the final section on relief officials. This is because the new boards of guardians were spending an increasing amount of their time dealing with workhouse issues by the 1840s and it is therefore appropriate to include an assessment of the union workhouses within the discussion on the working relationship between the guardians and the Central Commission. The experience of the indoor poor is examined; in particular, whether, as Jones and King have argued, they had some agency regarding any changes to conditions in the workhouses.¹⁰

In order to address the first theme in this chapter, outdoor relief, the overall trajectory of outdoor numbers across the 1840s and 1850s for parishes in the five study unions is assessed before looking in more detail at the support available to able-bodied men. As discussed in the previous chapter, records of outdoor and indoor poor numbers are likely to provide different results depending on whether they refer to numbers on a single day or over a period of time. Due to the varied nature of the relief records in the study unions for this period, the question of whether outdoor numbers rose, declined or remained stable is based mainly on weekly spending on outdoor relief rather than actual numbers of people in receipt of relief. Data has been taken from the winter months when the numbers were likely to be highest for each union.¹¹ There is more detailed information on the numbers and profile of the outdoor poor in the records for Chiddingly in the Hailsham union and this has been used to provide an in-depth assessment of outdoor relief recipients at parish level.

Starting with the wealden unions, for Uckfield the ledgers provide information on weekly spending on outdoor relief which covered both regular pensions and exceptional relief for each parish (see Table 6.1 below). It will be seen in the following discussion that exceptional relief payments to households varied considerably from a few shillings a week to three or four pounds and this resulted in some changes in weekly expenditure on outdoor relief. The data in

¹⁰ P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England, bearing Witness* (Macmillan: 2020).

¹¹ Williams noted that, 'every class of nineteenth-century pauper, with the exception of lunatics, was more numerous in winter than in summer': K. Williams, *From Pauperism*, 74.

Table 6.1 indicates some fluctuation at Uckfield, Waldron and East Hoathly across the sample years whereas in the larger parish of Rotherfield there is a notable rise during the 1850s, suggesting an increase in the number of households being supported in their homes. The population of Rotherfield went up by 360 between 1841 and 1861, which might partly account for this.¹²

Table 6.1 Uckfield union weekly spending in shillings for the first quarter of the year¹³

Parish	1841 Population	1836 Union ledgers	1846 Union ledgers	1855 Union Ledgers	1857 Union ledgers	1859/60 Union ledgers
Uckfield	1534	81	93	80	92	61
Rotherfield	3054	237	247	386	392	371
East Hoathly	607	35	53	72	61	46
Waldron	1065	164	124	153	154	148

In the adjacent Hailsham union the ledgers also provide information on expenditure in each parish and similar calculations to those for the Uckfield union are shown in Table 6.2 below. Again, there are slight variations between parishes with spending rising and falling at different times; in both unions it was slightly lower by the late-1850s, although in the parish of Hailsham in Table 6.2 it was at its lowest in 1849.¹⁴ However, with the exception of Rotherfield, there is no marked rise or fall in spending which would suggest a significant change in the number of people receiving outdoor relief during the mid-nineteenth century in the Weald.

Table 6.2 Hailsham union weekly spending in shillings for the first quarter of the year

Parish	1841 Population	1838 Union ledgers	1847 Union ledgers	1849 Union ledgers	1859/60 Union ledgers
Hailsham	1586	186	249	128	163
Hellingly	1675	234	260	214	125
Chiddingly	930	125	136	128	70
Laughton	850	199	158	125	112

Turning to the downland unions, there is more detail in the Newhaven union ledgers as they include the number of people in each parish in receipt of outdoor relief in addition to expenditure. It is most likely that children are included as the number of recipients varies

¹² East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), Rotherfield censuses, 1841, XA/19/6; 1851, XA/9/20; 1861, XA/2/10.

¹³ Data in Tables 6.1-6.5 is taken from the union ledgers listed in the bibliography.

¹⁴ Before the Union Chargeability Act of 1865 which imposed uniform charges on all parishes, each parish paid the union for the relief of their parishioners which is why the spending profile of parishes varied.

considerably. Unfortunately this makes it difficult to estimate how many households were supported and therefore only weekly spending is shown in Table 6.3 below to make the data compatible with the other unions.¹⁵ Once again there is evidence of some variation in spending across the years recorded and between parishes but no long-term rise or fall during the 1840s and 1850s.

Table 6.3 Newhaven union weekly spending in shillings for the first quarter of the year

Parish	1841 Population	1836 Union ledgers	1838 Union ledgers	1845 Union ledgers	1855 Union ledgers	1859 Union ledgers
Newhaven	1,265	90	35	122	119	84
Rottingdean	988	65	59	114	125	82
Rodmell	360	66	23	32	26	39
Piddinghoe	263	33	10	25	34	13

For the other downland union of West Firle data recorded in the ledgers is shown in Table 6.4 below. In these small parishes spending levels were similar to the small parishes in the Newhaven union and indicate fluctuations in each year. However, once again there is no evidence of a significant change in outdoor relief spending or related outdoor relief numbers between 1840 and 1860. Spending was lowest in the parish of Berwick where more money was allocated to indoor relief than outdoor relief, which was unusual. However, the emphasis on indoor support had started in the final years of the OPL when Berwick moved most paupers into a workhouse and severely reduced outdoor relief, emphasising once again the value of poor law studies which cross the accepted chronological boundaries that underpin much of the current literature. There was continuity in overseers and guardians between the Old and New Poor Laws in Berwick and the parish is a good example of officials following a 'straight path' in their administration of relief pre and post 1834, (see discussion below).

Table 6.4 West Firle union weekly spending in shillings for the first quarter of the year

Parish	1841 Population	1842 Union ledgers	1844 Union ledgers	1845 Union ledgers	1846 Union ledgers	1859 Union ledgers
Berwick	199	17	20	33	34	32
Alciston	275	76	72	63	75	42
Glynde	300	25	31	22	37	46

¹⁵ For example, in the Newhaven parish there were forty-five recipients listed in the first quarter of 1836 and thirteen in the fourth quarter, the other winter quarter.

Comparison between the predominantly rural unions and the union of Lewes is informative as the amount spent weekly on outdoor relief in the parish of St John Sub Castro is lower than the wealden parishes and some of the downland parishes when population is taken into account, (see Table 6.5 below). This supports findings in Chapters Four and Five that there were proportionately fewer people in the town in receipt of relief and that this may well have been due to the smaller number of agricultural labourers. As with the other unions, there are variations in spending in each year but no significant change mid-century.

Table 6.5 St John Sub Castro in the Lewes union weekly spending in shillings for the first quarter of the year

Parish	1841 Population	1836 Union ledgers	1838 Union ledgers	1841 Union ledgers	1848 Union ledgers	1852 Union ledgers	1863 Union ledgers
St John Sub Castro	2502	109	129	153	186	159	115

For one of the parishes in this study, Chiddingly in the Hailsham union, parish accounts of outdoor and indoor relief recipients are available for the years 1841-43, 1848-50 and 1853-60. It is therefore possible to obtain a more detailed picture of the number and profile of the outdoor poor during the 1840s and 1850s. Each set of accounts covers either a three-month or six-month period. All relief recipients were listed, including those receiving a regular pension, which is useful as it is possible to obtain the relative number of regular and temporary outdoor poor.¹⁶ Table 6.6 below gives a breakdown of people on the relief lists over six months covering the winter period October to March, including those given exceptional relief. Apart from two women in 1842/3, all exceptional relief recipients were able-bodied men.¹⁷ The results indicate that the number of regular pensioners ranged between sixteen and forty people which was lower than under the OPL in Chiddingly when there were as many as sixty households receiving weekly support during the 1820s, (see Chapter Four).

A further difference after 1834 is that regular pensioners were the old, infirm, widows and children and not male-headed families whereas in 1825 there were twenty-three families on

¹⁶ ESRO, Chiddingly parish accounts of outdoor relief, 1836-1863, P292/20/2.

¹⁷ As the accounts cover all outdoor poor for a six month period, the total numbers are higher than the weekly numbers for Chiddingly in the Hailsham union ledgers. This is because a number of different people would have been given temporary relief over the six months. Most regular pensioners would have received relief each week. In 1842/3 two women received exceptional relief; one because her husband was in prison and one whose husband had been transported. ESRO, Chiddingly parish accounts.

the weekly pension lists. During the 1850s there were more infirm elderly men than women in receipt of a pension. This possibly reflects the physical impact of a lifetime working as a labourer. The number of exceptional relief recipients ranged from twenty to thirty-six over six months in the selected years. The total number of people on the outdoor lists was lower by 1859/60, including regular pensioners. This trend is apparent in some, but not all, the parishes in the study and therefore may reflect varying circumstances at parish level rather than a decline in outdoor relief numbers across the unions.¹⁸

Table 6.6 Number of outdoor relief recipients in Chiddingly for six months from October to March based on the parish accounts. The grey shade refers to exceptional relief recipients, the unshaded rows refer to regular pensions. The children listed are those receiving relief in their own right; children from families are not included.¹⁹

	1842/43	1847/48	1849/50	1855/56	1859/60
Able-bodied men	36	30	36	20	21
Able-Bodied women	2	0	0	0	0
Widows	5	2	5	3	0
Elderly/infirm men	10	9	11	9	8
Elderly/infirm women	10	8	13	3	3
Children	7	4	0	2	5
Idiot	3	1	0	0	0
Total on relief list	73	54	65	37	38

In addition to the Chiddingly records, the boards of guardians' minute books for two of the Sussex unions, Hailsham in the Weald and Newhaven on the Downs, include lists of exceptional relief recipients, as noted in Chapter Five. The Hailsham minutes included these payments throughout the 1840s, while the Newhaven minutes continued to record exceptional relief during the 1850s.²⁰ Looking firstly at the Hailsham union, all of the requests came from able-bodied men; the majority were agricultural labourers with families.²¹ This is consistent with the

¹⁸ Varying circumstances could include people dying, family health, employment opportunities in each parish.

¹⁹ ESRO, Chiddingly parish accounts of paupers relieved, 1836-63, P/292/20/2.

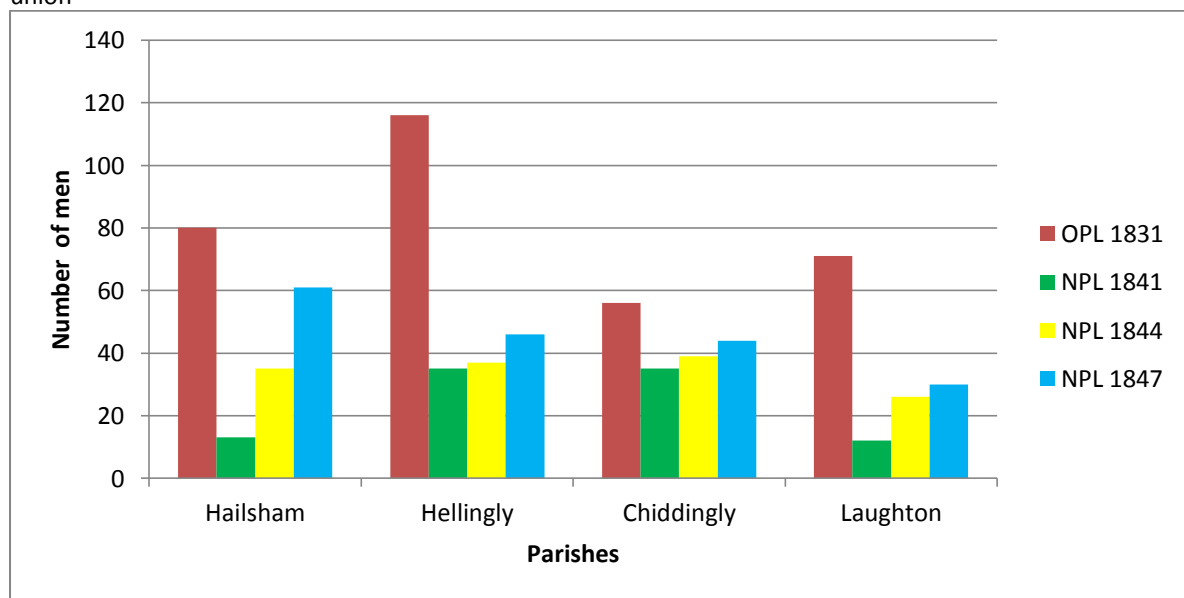
²⁰ In the other unions exceptional relief payments were recorded in separate books which have not survived. It is likely that the clerk for the Hailsham union began to use a separate book for these payments in the 1850s rather than using the minute books.

²¹ Between one half and three quarters of the men named in the minutes can be matched in the censuses and the majority of the men identified were agricultural labourers. The few exceptions included one gardener, one

findings for the parishes in Sussex during the final decades of the OPL and also for French's recent work on Terling in Essex, both of which were discussed in Chapter Four.²² The number of men given exceptional relief each week was small; between four and eight in Chiddingly and Laughton and between six and ten in the larger parishes of Hailsham and Hellingly.

Figure 6.1 below compares the number of able-bodied men in receipt of outdoor relief annually at the end of the OPL and during the 1840s under the NPL in the four parishes discussed in this study which joined the Hailsham union. While there was initially a considerable drop in numbers, in some parishes they rose during the 1840s; in Hailsham and Chiddingly they came close to those for the end of the OPL. It is therefore possible that the guardians were supporting more able-bodied men once the NPL became established, as suggested by King and Digby. This is a small sample and the increase was more pronounced in certain parishes, again emphasising continued variations between parishes following unionisation. On the other hand, the data suggests that the guardians in the Hailsham union were adopting a more relaxed approach by the 1840s.

Figure 6.1 Number of able-bodied men in receipt of relief within year 1831 under the OPL and 1841, 1844 and 1847 under the NPL due to exceptions under the prohibitory orders in four parishes which joined the Hailsham union²³



shepherd and several brickmakers: ESRO, Hailsham 1841 census, LIB/503565; Hellingly 1841 census, XA/19/4; Chiddingly 1841 census, XA/19/6; Laughton 1841 census, XA/19/6.

²² French, 'How dependent?' Hollen Lees also found that under the NPL men on welfare were predominantly married with families: Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 213. Stapleton noted that family men with three or more children were particularly susceptible to poverty in rural economies: B. Stapleton, 'Inherited Poverty and Life-Cycle Poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650-1850,' *Social History*, 18, (1993), 339-355.

²³ Data for 1831 is taken from parish overseers' accounts and information on exceptional relief is taken from the boards of guardians' minute books, these sources are listed in the bibliography.

However, it should be noted that many of the able-bodied men in the Hailsham union were in receipt of regular relief under the OPL. In the parishes in Figure 6.1 there were between thirty and fifty households headed by able-bodied men on the regular relief lists in 1831.²⁴ This contrasts with the NPL when on average half of the men given exceptional relief during the 1840s were paid for only one or two weeks of the year. Relief prior to 1834 could supplement household incomes over a sustained period, although as noted in Chapter Four, the form and amount of relief did vary. Exceptional relief payments were almost exclusively given in the short-term for medical reasons. King's argument that medical support was becoming an increasingly important component of the relief system was certainly true in the Sussex unions by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ Payments during the 1840s were similar to those of the late-1830s noted in the previous chapter. Men were given relief in kind in the form of flour, mutton and occasionally porter to assist their families during illness; attendance by a nurse or doctor was often recommended and funerals were paid for. Sometimes cash payments were made which were usually between 2s. and 7s. a week. However, some individuals were given up to two or three pounds and were paid over a longer period if they had a serious condition. For example, in 1847 John Greyling from Hellingly received exceptional relief for ten weeks due to a fractured leg.²⁶

As exceptional relief under the NPL was generally administered for shorter periods of time than outdoor relief under the OPL, this meant that payments tended to be far smaller. The Chiddingly parish outdoor relief lists which cover 1840-1860 include details of exceptional relief payments and Figure 6.2 below shows the annual nominal value of relief given to individuals in Chiddingly for four years with complete records. Approximately half of the men received less than one pound of relief in a year and the majority received under five pounds. This indicates that under the NPL many able-bodied men received considerably smaller payments than under the OPL. The case studies in Chapter Four found that some individuals received over £20 a year in poor relief.²⁷ In comparison, fewer than six men received more than five pounds in a year under the New Poor Law (see Figure 6.2) and it was intended that this money was to help during a crisis period of illness. On the other hand, support for medical reasons would still have

²⁴ Parish overseers' accounts listed in the bibliography.

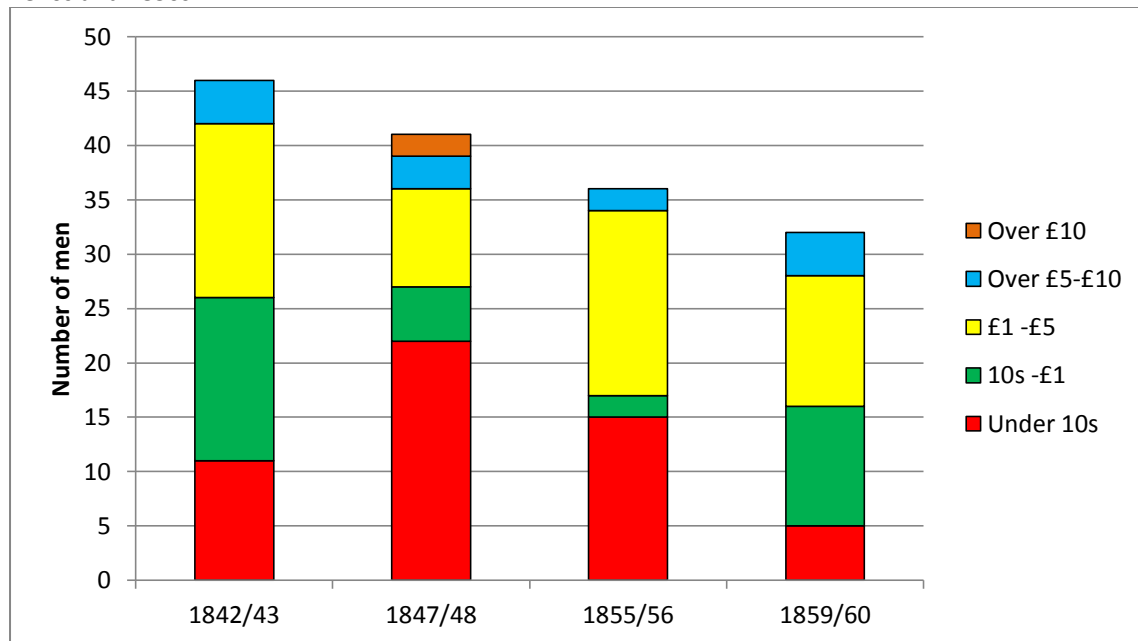
²⁵ Steven King, *Sickness, Medical Welfare and the English Poor, 1750-1834* (Manchester: 2018).

²⁶ ESRO, Hailsham union board of guardians' minute book (Hailsham minutes), 1845-47, G/5/1a/6.

²⁷ Richard Henley received thirty pounds in relief from the Lewes overseers: ESRO, Lewes, St John Sub Castro accounts of out-relief, PAR412/31/3/3, 1823-32.

been of value in enabling labourers to obtain additional food, fuel or medical attention to help with illness. It could also make a difference if a man was unwell and could not work.

Figure 6.2 Nominal monetary value of relief given to able-bodied men in Chiddingly in sample years during the 1840s and 1850s²⁸



It is not possible to know from the Sussex evidence whether there were instances when the claimant’s illness was not genuine, but there are hints in the records, notably for the Weald, that make this a possibility. Digby’s reference to relief given ‘ostensibly’ for illness referred to agricultural communities where the guardians, who were predominantly farmers, wished to maintain their workforce during times of seasonal underemployment.²⁹ Most exceptional relief recipients in the Hailsham union were agricultural labourers and in some years during the 1840s all the Hailsham union guardians were farmers, (see discussion below). The minutes often referred to general ‘illness’ which might suggest a deliberate vagueness so that support could be provided to the household and relatively minor conditions such as catarrh or carbuncles enabled men to receive relief for one or two weeks. There was also a high proportion of exceptional payments made due to a wife or children being ill which accords with the comments, noted above, that were made by the Bromsgrove union clerk to the Poor Law Commission.³⁰ However, some illnesses such as typhus, consumption or pneumonia would

²⁸ Data is taken from the Chiddingly parish accounts of outdoor poor listed in the bibliography.

²⁹ Digby, ‘The Rural Poor Law’.

³⁰ In Chiddingly for example in 1842 thirteen out of twenty-nine exceptional relief payments were made due to a wife being ill/confined or a child being ill and in 1858 the numbers were twenty-six out of forty-two.

have warranted medical attention and certainly justified absence from work. The same would apply to serious accidents recorded in the minutes that resulted in fractures and crushed fingers.

There were times in some winter months when the Hailsham union guardians gave outdoor relief because high numbers of labourers were unable to work or could not be accommodated in the workhouse. While the Poor Law Commissioners did not intend able-bodied men to be given this form of relief when out of work, the guardians resorted to the 'sudden and urgent necessity' clause.³¹ The minutes show that permission was obtained from the Commissioners for these payments. Guardians in one of the neighbouring wealden unions, Uckfield, referred to, 'the bad seasons in this district which made work difficult', possibly because of the heavy wealden clay that affected many areas.³² In January 1842 and February 1845 between thirty-five and forty families in the Hailsham union were given outdoor relief as snow prevented work and the workhouse was 'overcrowded'.³³

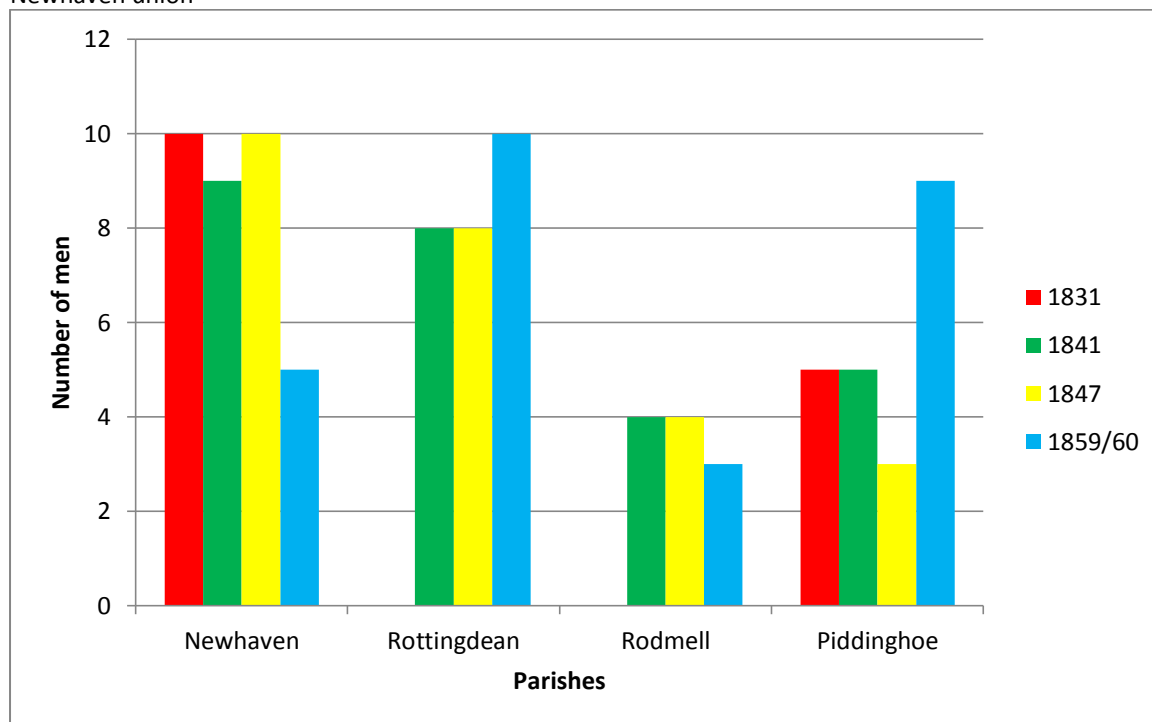
Turning now to the Newhaven union, the board of guardians' minute books provide an even more detailed account than the Hailsham minutes of the people who received exceptional relief for both the 1840s and 1850s. The guardians dealt with a similar number of weekly requests from parishioners in both the Hailsham and Newhaven unions, approximately four to eight requests from each parish. However, there were proportionately fewer requests from able-bodied men in the Newhaven union as males and females of all ages sought this form of support. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Five, the clerk recorded every case including several that were turned down. Significantly, all requests for outdoor relief due to unemployment were refused and only 'the house' was offered even during spells of bad weather when the wealden guardians had provided outdoor relief. This might reflect a harsher approach by the Newhaven guardians but it could also have been due to practical reasons as, unlike the wealden workhouses, the Newhaven workhouse never reached full capacity during the 1840s and 1850s.

³¹ Hurren found that in the Brixworth union in Northamptonshire outdoor relief continued to be given to families in an area where seasonal employment and underemployment were an issue: E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Suffolk: 2007), 98-101.

³² ESRO, Uckfield union board of guardians' minute book (Uckfield minutes), 1836-39, G/11/1a/1.

³³ ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1842-46, G/5/1a/4-5. Crowther found that some unions in Kent were also giving outdoor relief in severe winters: Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 45.

Figure 6.3 Number of able-bodied men in receipt of relief over a year during 1831 under the OPL and 1841, 1847 and 1859/60 under the NPL due to exceptions under the prohibitory orders in four parishes which joined the Newhaven union³⁴



Fortunately, the age, occupation and family details of those seeking support in the Newhaven union are available, and it is therefore possible to estimate how many requests came from able-bodied labourers. Figure 6.3 above shows the number of able-bodied men who received outdoor relief at the end of the OPL and exceptional relief during the 1840s and 1850s. For the two parishes with data for 1831 there was a very small reduction in numbers for one and no change in the other. This was a very different situation compared with the wealden parishes discussed above. No more than ten able-bodied men were given relief from each downland parish in any one year throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Information from the minutes shows that the majority had families and the 1841 census confirms that with only one or two exceptions the men were agricultural labourers, which was similar to the Hailsham union.³⁵ When comparing the 1840s with the 1850s in Figure 6.3, it is difficult to identify any clear trend as the number of people receiving outdoor relief in any one year did not exceed ten. However,

³⁴ Data for 1831 is taken from parish overseers' accounts. Records of outdoor relief during the 1820s/1830s are not available for Rottingdean and Rodmell. Information on exceptional relief is taken from the board of guardians' minute books. These records are listed in the bibliography.

³⁵ For example in 1841 six out of eight men given exceptional relief in Rottingdean had families and all ten men from Newhaven had families. All of the men listed in 1841 were agricultural labourers except for one waterman and one blacksmith: ESRO, Newhaven census, 1841, XA/19/4; Rottingdean census, 1841, XA/19/4; Rodmell census, 1841, XA/19/4; Piddinghoe census, 1841, XA/19/4.

the data suggests that the situation remained reasonably stable across the first decades of the NPL and for the two parishes with surviving OPL records numbers were also stable at the interchange between the Old and New Poor Laws.

The contrast between the number of able-bodied men in receipt of outdoor relief in the Weald and on the Downs which was apparent under the OPL therefore persisted after 1834.³⁶ Better employment opportunities on the Downs seem to have enabled labourers to support their families; most exceptional relief payments were made when the male household head was ill rather than because his children were unwell or his wife confined. For example, in Rottingdean, in the Newhaven union, only two individual payments were made for a wife's illness throughout the 1840s and 1850s. In contrast in a similar sized parish, Chiddingly in the Hailsham union, between ten and twenty-five exceptional relief payments were made each year during the 1840s and 1850s because a wife or a child was ill. This difference between the two unions lends further weight to the argument that the wealden guardians were making use of 'ostensible' illness in families to support labourers.

Not only were the Newhaven guardians giving fewer people exceptional relief, but they also appear to have made a more rigorous check of the financial background of those requesting relief before agreeing to give support. They questioned whether the claimant was a member of a benefit club, if family members were earning, and whether there were lodgers in the household.³⁷ This detail provides a useful insight into the range of makeshift economies that were available to the poor in this union, (see discussion below). The Newhaven guardians' examination of each claimant's financial circumstances contrasts with the less rigorous approach of the Hailsham guardians. In the Hailsham union minutes the clerk simply listed the relief recipients. Continuity in personnel between the Old and New Poor Laws in Sussex was

³⁶ In Table 4.2 in Chapter Four which recorded the number of able-bodied men with families in receipt of outdoor relief under the OPL, there were up to one hundred families in one wealden parish but fewer than twenty in the downland parishes.

³⁷ Gorsky identified an apparent rise in membership of benefit clubs or friendly societies following the NPL: M. Gorsky, 'The Growth and Distribution of English Friendly Societies in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 51 (1998), 489-511. Williams found that forty-four per cent of male household heads belonged to a friendly society in the parish of Westoning in rural Bedfordshire in the 1830s: S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Suffolk: 2011), 155. From the point of view of labourers, membership of a benefit club may have been a disadvantage when claiming relief. In the parish of Godmanchester in Cambridgeshire subscribers to a benefit club decided to break up their club in 1836 as the guardians declined to give members poor relief: *Bells Weekly Messenger*, April 18th, 1836. There are references elsewhere in the board of guardians' minute book to membership of a benefit club in the Hailsham union: Hailsham minutes, 1840-42, G/5/1a/3.

noted in the previous chapter and continued during the 1840s, (see discussion below). The Hailsham union guardians were used to supporting high numbers of labourers under the OPL in contrast to their neighbours on the Downs and the officials from both unions seem to have continued on this 'straight path' after 1834.

There were some similarities in the exceptional relief payments between the two unions. In Newhaven relief was given in cash and kind averaging between 2s. and 7s. in a week, although there is no evidence of higher payments. As in the Hailsham union, those with minor ailments received relief for one or two weeks but those with serious conditions were supported for longer periods. Attendance from a nurse or doctor and funeral arrangements were also paid for. It was noted above that the nominal monetary value of relief given to men in the Hailsham union was lower under the NPL and this seems to be the case at least in the parish of Newhaven where men received an average of £6 - £10 in a year mainly in the form of flour, rent and clothes for their children during the 1820s.³⁸

While exceptional relief payments meant that a number of able-bodied men continued to receive outdoor relief, this examination has established that the number of outdoor poor during the NPL years 1840-1860 remained lower than during the final OPL years in the study unions. In the previous chapter it was noted that during the late-1830s when the scale of outdoor relief was reduced, workhouse numbers did not greatly increase. There was a slight rise in able-bodied inmates who generally made use of indoor support on a temporary basis. The discussion now turns to consider the number and profile of the indoor poor during the 1840s and 1850s to assess whether relatively low numbers persisted once the PLAA had become established in eastern Sussex. Similar questions to those in the section above on outdoor relief will be asked regarding the trajectory of numbers during these years. The profile of workhouse inmates will be compared across unions and again, where possible, the number of indoor poor from individual parishes in this study will be considered and compared with the OPL. Finally, a more detailed assessment of able-bodied men in the workhouses will be carried out for two unions with extant admission and discharge records: Hailsham in the Weald and Newhaven on the Downs.³⁹

³⁸ ESRO, Newhaven parish ledgers, 1821-1827, P426/1/2.

³⁹ In the workhouse registers the poor were classed according to the diet they were given. These classes sometimes changed over time and between unions and therefore the classes in the tables below vary. Children

Tables 6.7-6.11 below show the number and profile of the indoor poor in the five study unions for years with available records. Data is taken from a combination of workhouse admission and discharge registers, boards of guardians' minute books, and poor law inspectors' reports. Starting with the two wealden unions, the number and profile of the indoor poor on a single day was recorded in the Uckfield union admission and discharge records in 1851 and 1861 and in Inspector Grenville Pigott's report in 1855 and is presented in Table 6.7. The profile is similar to other studies of rural unions which have identified proportionately more children in the workhouses and more elderly men than elderly women during the early decades of the NPL.⁴⁰ Goose states that a relatively high number of old men in workhouses was, 'universal but particularly pronounced in agricultural areas'.⁴¹ This reflects the hard life that many agricultural labourers experienced as they worked outdoors throughout the year with low wages and uncertain employment. The high number of indoor poor under sixteen is partly explained by the practice of taking children from large agricultural families into the workhouse.⁴² The record for 1855 suggests that fewer able-bodied poor were making use of the workhouse which may explain why there were less children. If so, this would demonstrate how quickly numbers could change depending on the admission of one or two families.

were classed according to age but have been included in the table under one category. As noted in the discussion below, by the 1850s several workhouses in Sussex had a sick ward. However, the sick do not appear to have been listed as a separate category but grouped with the infirm or disabled in the Sussex unions.

⁴⁰ Studies include Goose, 'Workhouse Populations'; Hinde and Turnbull, 'The Populations' and Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*.

⁴¹ Goose, 'Workhouse Populations', 60. Hollen Lees suggests that elderly women could obtain a small income from work such as taking in washing: Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities*, 209. Hurren notes that impoverishment was a real threat for elderly labourers, although they avoided the workhouse if at all possible: Hurren, *Protesting*, 105.

⁴² As noted above, the Uckfield guardians originally wanted to take the male head of the household into the workhouse and support the family outdoors but the Poor Law Commissioners would not agree. The guardians initially resisted but by the later 1840s there are examples in the Central Authority papers of children being taken into the workhouse: The National Archives (TNA), Uckfield union, 1847-51, MH 12/13163; 1852-54, MH 12/13164.

Table 6.7 Profile of the indoor poor in the Uckfield union on one day⁴³

	a.b. men	a.b. women	Total a.b	Old/inf men	Old/inf women	Total old/inf	Children	Idiots	Total
January 1851	19	20	39	46	22	68	74	9	190
March 1855	0	11	11			41	44	11	107
January 1861	8	14	22	47	24	71	73	8	174

Some comparison between the number of indoor poor from each of the study parishes in the Uckfield union under the Old and New Poor Laws is possible as the registers refer to the number of individuals from each parish on the 1st of January 1851. These are: Rotherfield, forty-nine; Uckfield, eleven; Waldron eight and East Hoathly three. In the summer of 1832 the numbers on one day were: Rotherfield, thirty-two; Uckfield, thirty-six; Waldron, twenty-eight; East Hoathly no information. Taking into consideration the fluctuation in indoor numbers and the difference in seasons, this data does not indicate a notable rise in people going into the workhouse from each parish under the NPL and even suggests a slight fall in numbers in some parishes.⁴⁴

The number and profile of the indoor poor from the admission and discharge registers for the other wealden union of Hailsham is shown in table 6.8 below. There is no clear evidence of a significant change in indoor numbers between 1840 and 1855, although the numbers are slightly lower in 1860. Between 1845 and 1860 there appears to have been some seasonal fluctuations with fewer indoor poor in the summer months. However, the picture is not clear cut with some higher numbers in June 1840 than December 1840.⁴⁵ As in the Uckfield union workhouse, there were many children and more elderly men than elderly women (with the exception of June 1840).

⁴³ Pigott's report for 1855 does not distinguish between elderly men and women: TNA, Uckfield union, 1852-55, MH 12/13164.

⁴⁴ ESRO, Uckfield union admission and discharge registers, 1851-1852, G/11/19/1; *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners*, 1834.

⁴⁵ Hinde and Turnbull also found that there were peaks in numbers in some summer months: Hinde and Turnbull, 'The Populations', 44. It is not clear why there was a higher number in June in the Hailsham workhouse. There was a particularly high number of children and also able-bodied women. A few large families could lead to a noticeable increase in indoor numbers.

Table 6.8 Profile of the indoor poor in the Hellingly workhouse in the Hailsham union on one day. Numbers in the white rows are taken from December and numbers in the blue rows are taken from June⁴⁶

	a.b. men	Old/inf men	a.b. women	Old/inf women	Children	Total
1840	31	11	51	16	179	288
1840	38	28	40	11	154	251
1845	29	30	21	15	93	133
1845	25	30	31	15	86	192
1850	8	30	14	15	68	135
1850	62	30	47	15	135	287
1855	15	24	26	8	78	151
1855	26	34	40	11	94	205
1860	8	28	22	8	46	112
1860	20	38	38	14	50	160

Moving the discussion on to the two much smaller downland unions of Newhaven and West Firle, in both unions in most years with records overall numbers of indoor poor ranged between thirty and sixty-five. Tables 6.9 and 6.10 below show data for the Newhaven union from the admission and discharge registers between 1840 and 1860. A separate table is given for the years 1840-1845 as the registers do not distinguish between the able-bodied and the elderly for these years. The tables indicate that the number of indoor poor was slightly higher in the 1840s than in the 1850s and slightly lower in the summer than in the winter in some, but not all years. The profile of inmates was approximately one third able-bodied, one third children and one third elderly, although these proportions did vary. The higher number of children noted in the Weald is less apparent on the Downs where relatively full employment for agricultural labourers meant that the guardians were less likely to resort to a policy of admitting children from large families into the workhouse. Children listed in the workhouse registers were either accompanied by their parents or were deserted or orphans.

⁴⁶ Data in Table 6.8 is taken from the Hailsham union workhouse admission and discharge registers listed in the bibliography. As noted in the previous chapter, two workhouses were in operation in Hailsham until the mid-1850s: the Hailsham workhouse had approximately fifty elderly residents who then moved into the Hellingly workhouse in 1855. The number of elderly people in Table 6.8 is an estimate prior to 1855 based on the incomplete Hailsham workhouse admission and discharge registers. Idiots are not listed as a separate category.

Table 6.9 Profile of the indoor poor in the Newhaven union on one day. Numbers in the white rows in the two tables are taken from December and numbers in the blue rows are taken from June

	Total Men	Total Women	Children	Total
1840	21	14	30	65
1840	15	14	26	55
1845	15	17	21	53
1845	19	14	21	54

Table 6.10 Profile of the indoor poor in the Newhaven union on one day

	a.b. men	Old/inf men	Total men	a.b. women	Old/inf women	Total women	Children	Total
1851	3	8	11	7	2	9	9	29
1851	5	8	13	11	2	13	14	40
1856	0	14	14	9	2	11	12	37
1856	4	12	16	11	1	12	20	48
1860	1	13	14	5	4	9	8	31
1860	4	15	19	6	3	9	11	39

Information on inmates in the West Firle workhouse has been taken from Poor Law Inspector Grenville Pigott's reports and is shown in Table 6.11 below.⁴⁷ The number of able-bodied paupers was lower than the number of children and elderly/infirm in the years where records are available. The Central Commission's records refer to full employment in the Firle union on several occasions, which would account for the lower proportion of able-bodied inmates.⁴⁸ However, there were still fluctuations in this union as Pigott recorded in April 1849 that the workhouse was, 'unusually full' with several able-bodied male inmates because the farmers could not find employment for them. In January 1854 there were discussions between the guardians and the Poor Law Board regarding taking children from large families into the workhouse; the cost of provisions was particularly high during the winter of 1854 which might explain why families were struggling.⁴⁹ The number of indoor poor from each parish was recorded in the union ledgers and for the four parishes in this study which joined the West Firle union there were between one to sixteen people over a three-month period.⁵⁰ At the end of the OPL there were eighteen indoor poor in the Berwick workhouse, suggesting numbers were

⁴⁷ TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190.

⁴⁸ TNA, West Firle, 1855-60, MH 12/13191.

⁴⁹ TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190.

⁵⁰ ESRO, West Firle union general ledgers, 1836-47, G/12/2a/1; 1858-63, G/12/2a/2.

similar before and after the PLAA, although this is only a small sample. There was no indoor provision in Glynde and Alciston under the OPL and therefore this form of relief was a new experience for the poor of some parishes.⁵¹

Table 6.11 Profile of the indoor poor in the West Firle union on one day

	a.b. men	a.b. women	Old/ infirm men/women	Children	Idiot	Total
Nov 1852	2	4	22	18	-	46
Aug 1853	0	2	18	13	3	36
Nov 1855	0	2	19	17	1	40
Nov 1858	2	1	31	13	2	49
May 1860	0	1	20	11	2	34

Comparison of indoor numbers between the predominantly rural unions in the Weald and on the Downs can be made with the town of Lewes. As noted in the previous chapter, three Old Poor Law workhouses were retained until 1868 in Lewes. The totals for each workhouse were recorded periodically in the board of guardians' minute books, although separate numbers were not noted for males and females (see Table 6.12 below). Between 1840 and 1860 the total number of indoor poor was again reasonably consistent, allowing for some families entering the workhouse short-term. There is a more even spread between the able-bodied, the elderly and children compared with most of the rural parishes and not an obvious seasonal disparity. This might be expected given the far fewer agricultural labourers in the town union compared with the rural parishes noted elsewhere in this study.

It is possible to assess the number and profile of the indoor poor from the parish of St John Sub Castro in Lewes for two years, 1841 and 1843, as this information was recorded in the Poor Law Commissioners' papers. In both years the total quarterly numbers ranged between twenty-five and forty-four.⁵² At the end of the OPL there were approximately twenty-nine indoor poor from the parish recorded on one day. As the quarterly figures are likely to be higher than the figure for one day, there is no clear evidence of a rise or fall in numbers under the New Poor Law. The breakdown of indoor paupers from St John Sub Castro across the two years 1841 and 1843

⁵¹ *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners*, 1834.

⁵² TNA, Lewes, 1838-42, MH 12/13106; Lewes, 1843-47, MH 12/13107. The two periods when the numbers were lowest were in fact the winter quarters.

was: able-bodied twenty to thirty quarterly; old/infirm twelve to fifteen quarterly and children five to ten quarterly.⁵³

Table 6.12 Profile of the indoor poor in the Lewes union on one day. Numbers in the white rows are taken from December and numbers in the blue rows are taken from June⁵⁴

	Able-bodied	Old/Infirm	Children	Total
1839	52	30	75	157
1843	59	35	52	146
1845	26	43	44	113
1845	36	38	44	118
1848	35	45	37	117
1851	28	50	34	112
1853	47	55	32	134
1856	52	49	37	138
1856	69	45	37	151
1858	56	50	40	146

This assessment of the trajectory of indoor numbers and the profile of the indoor poor has shown that there were more people in the wealden and Lewes workhouses compared with the downland workhouses, but this might be expected given the relative populations of the unions in these areas.⁵⁵ In fact, the number of indoor poor from individual parishes and between the regions was similar when scaled against population size. For example, inmates in the parishes in the Uckfield union on one day in 1851 and one day in 1861 comprised only 1% of the parish populations. The Chiddingly parish accounts provide numbers of indoor poor over a year for several years in the 1850s and they represented 3.6% of the population.⁵⁶ In the downland parishes between 1.4% and 1.5% of the parish populations were in the workhouse at any one time and in St John Sub Castro in Lewes an average of 1.5% of the population was in the workhouses in 1841 and 1843.⁵⁷ This is important as it indicates that use of the workhouse was

⁵³ The number of able-bodied indoor poor over several weeks was likely to have been higher than the number of the elderly or children as many went in and out of the workhouse on a short-term basis. Some children may have accompanied the able-bodied.

⁵⁴ This data is taken from the Lewes minutes listed in the bibliography.

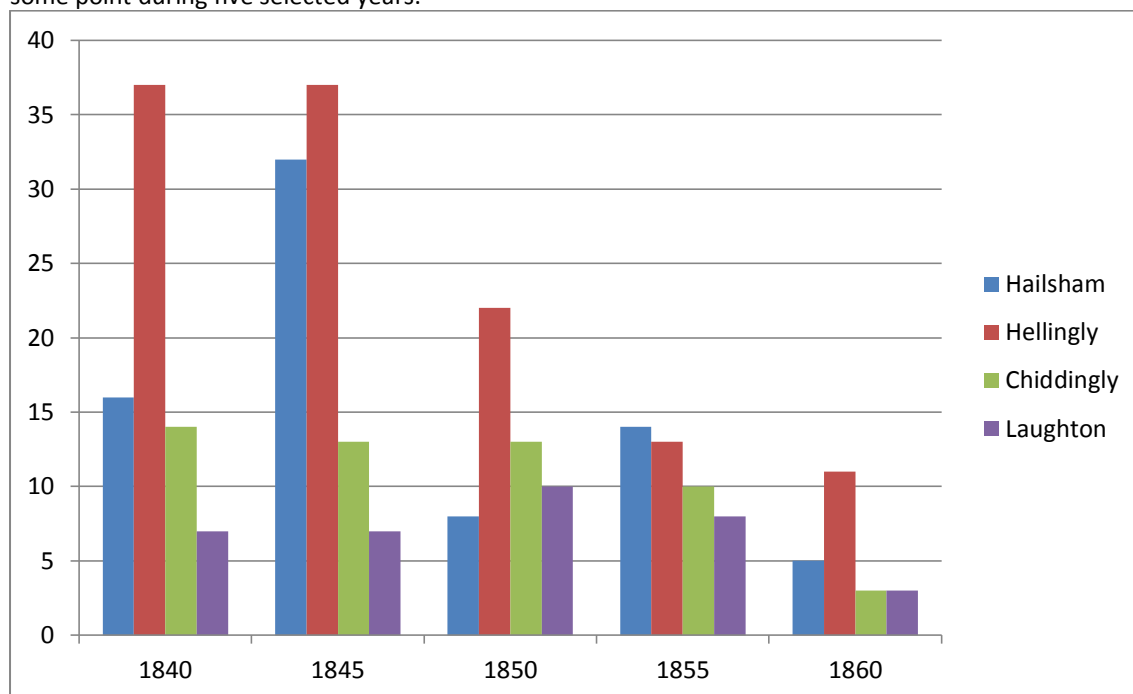
⁵⁵ As recorded in the previous chapter, the populations of the wealden unions in 1841 were 13,929 and 15,949; in the downland unions they were 2,367 and 4,224 and in Lewes, 9,199.

⁵⁶ This slightly higher number for Chiddingly illustrates the difference that can occur when looking at total numbers over a year rather than at one point in time.

⁵⁷ ESRO, Uckfield union admission and discharge registers, 1851-1865, G/11/19/1-3; Chiddingly parish accounts of paupers relieved, 1836-1863, P292/20/2; Newhaven union general ledgers, 1835-39, G7/2a/1 and 1844-46,

low in all the parishes. Furthermore, despite higher poverty in the Weald, a similar proportion of the population was making use of the workhouse compared with the downland parishes and Lewes.⁵⁸

Figure 6.4 Number of able-bodied men from four parishes in the Hailsham union admitted to the workhouse at some point during five selected years.⁵⁹



Yet, it was able-bodied men who the Poor Law Commissioners were most concerned to see removed from the outdoor relief lists and only given the option of the workhouse. It would therefore be helpful to examine more closely how many able-bodied men went into the workhouses in the study unions during the mid-nineteenth century. Extant admission and discharge registers for the Hailsham and Newhaven unions make it possible to address this question and enable comparisons to be made between the Weald and the Downs. Figure 6.4 above shows how many able-bodied men were admitted to the workhouse from the four study parishes in the Hailsham union across the years 1840-1860.⁶⁰ When the men's occupation is given in the registers, they were described as labourers with only one or two exceptions.⁶¹

G/7/2a/2; West Fille union general ledgers, 1836-47, G12/2a/1 and 1858-63, G/12/2a/2; Lewes minutes, 1839-43, G/6/1a/2. The numbers are likely to be higher when looking at the indoor poor over one year.

⁵⁸ Studies by Goose, and Hinde and Turnbull do not give this data as they do not include numbers from each parish. However, the Sussex percentages support K. Williams' observation that workhouses could accommodate 1.2% of the population of England and Wales, both pre and post 1834: Williams, *From Pauperism*, 80.

⁵⁹ Data in Figure 6.4 is taken from the Hailsham union admission and discharge registers listed in the bibliography.

⁶⁰ Numbers have been recorded for every five years to provide a reasonable, evenly matched sample.

⁶¹ In 1840 there was one tailor and one shoemaker. In 1845 there was one shoemaker and one post boy.

More single men than men with families were admitted, which supports the findings of Digby and Hinde and Turnbull.⁶² The reason for entering the workhouse was sometimes recorded. In just over half of all cases it was unemployment; the other main reason was illness.

In the two smaller parishes of Chiddingly and Laughton fewer than fifteen able-bodied men entered the workhouse at some point during selected years and the number only rose above fifteen in one sample year for Hailsham. There was a higher number of indoor poor from the parish of Hellingly, notably during the 1840s, which is another example of variations between parishes within a union. A combination of factors including poor harvests and severe winter weather during the 1840s may account for increased unemployment during that decade. Hellingly had the largest population of the four parishes and under the OPL it had one of the highest numbers of relief recipients, in particular agricultural labourers. It is therefore not surprising that there were more able-bodied men from that parish making use of indoor support during the 1840s.⁶³ Most of the men in the registers spent only a few days or weeks in the workhouse, notably in the winter months. This assessment suggests that while indoor relief could prove a useful means of help in times of crisis, it did not provide agricultural labourers with regular support. It is also clear that the high number of able-bodied men in receipt of poor relief in the final years of the OPL was not matched by the number of able-bodied men in the workhouse under the NPL. In Chapter Four it was noted that between eighty and one hundred male-headed families received relief in some wealden parishes under the OPL and the total number would have been higher when single men are included.

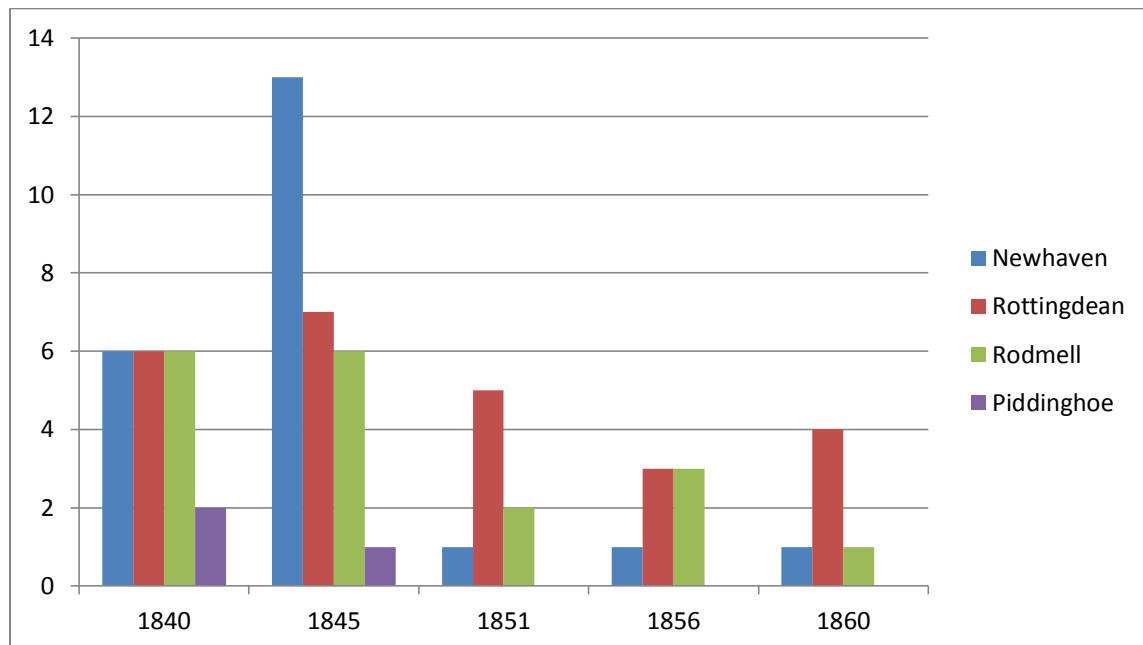
Figure 6.5 below provides the same information on the number of able-bodied men in the workhouse for four parishes in the Newhaven union, again using admission and discharge registers. The occupations of the men included labourer, shepherd and seaman. There were more single men than men with families; approximately two thirds were single. With the exception of Newhaven parish in 1845, fewer than eight men from each parish each year entered the workhouse. In the sample years during the 1850s there were no able-bodied men in the workhouse from Piddinghoe. Although the numbers are very small in the downland

⁶² For example, in 1845 six out of thirty two men from the parish of Hailsham were in the workhouse with their family and nine out of thirty seven men from Hellingly were recorded with a family. Digby, and Hinde and Turnbull noted that it was more expensive for guardians to support married men with families in the workhouse: A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (London: 1978), 6-7; Hinde and Turnbull, 'The Populations', 39.

⁶³ It is also possible that more men from Hellingly made use of the workhouse as it was located in their parish.

workhouse, when comparing the trends with the wealden workhouse there is a similar pattern with numbers going down in the 1850s, particularly in the larger parishes.

Figure 6.5 Number of able-bodied men from four parishes in the Newhaven union who were in the workhouse at some point during five selected years⁶⁴



Analysis of indoor relief has shown that, as with outdoor relief, indoor numbers were quite stable during the 1840s and 1850s, although there appear to have been fewer people by 1860 in the Hailsham and Newhaven union workhouses.⁶⁵ The size of workhouse populations in all the unions fluctuated due to factors such as bad weather and unemployment. There is some evidence of seasonal changes with fewer indoor poor in the summer months in the wealden workhouses where underemployment in the winter was an issue. In the Weald there were also more elderly men and children in receipt of indoor relief which supports the findings from other studies. However, when taking into consideration population levels, the number of indoor poor was low and there were similar proportions of the parish populations in the workhouses in the different regions of the Weald, the Downs and the town of Lewes.

This discussion of indoor relief has found that numbers of able-bodied men in the workhouses in both the Weald and on the Downs were low. The men were predominantly agricultural

⁶⁴ Data in Figure 6.5 is taken from the Newhaven union admission and discharge registers listed in the bibliography.

⁶⁵ As noted in Chapter Two, Goose found that workhouse admissions declined during the 1850s; however, there were still peaks and troughs during this decade: Goose, 'Workhouse Populations', 65.

labourers, there were more single men than men with families, and they generally accessed indoor relief for a short time due to unemployment, which supports the findings of other studies.⁶⁶ There are indications from this analysis that the NPL workhouses succeeded in acting as a deterrent as the number of indoor poor from some parishes may have declined following 1834. However, the sample in this study is small and it would be of great value for further studies to be carried out. Nevertheless, the apparent reduction in the size of the outdoor relief lists noted above was not reflected by high numbers of indoor poor. The workhouse would have been offered to more people than appear in the records; the boards of guardians' minute books provide evidence of cases where adults of both sexes and all ages did not take up the 'offer of the house', suggesting that they regarded this form of support as something to be avoided.⁶⁷ At the same time workhouses did provide the poor with a refuge during periods of crisis and this is evidenced by the number of able-bodied poor making short-term use of indoor relief under the NPL.

An obvious question to ask, and a very difficult one to answer, is how did families cope during the 1840s and 1850s if they received less, or no, outdoor relief and they were making minimal use of the workhouse? It is possible that the poor avoided indoor relief because they were able to make use of other resources. Poor relief is seen within the historiography as one aspect of a makeshift economy and considerable focus has been given to various other means of subsistence.⁶⁸ As already noted, the Newhaven boards of guardians' minute books provide some information on economies practised by families. While it is outside the scope of this discussion to analyse makeshift economies in Sussex, it is worth briefly considering what options were open to the poor in the study parishes.

It is evident from the censuses that two important sources of support were practised in Sussex: familial help, either in the form of providing a home or bringing in additional earnings; and taking in lodgers. Both of these strategies offered support to the elderly and to paupers of all

⁶⁶ Hinde and Turnbull, 'The Populations', 39-50.

⁶⁷ There are examples of males and females being offered the house in one week and then requesting outdoor relief the following week: ESRO, Newhaven union board of guardians' minute book, (Newhaven minutes), 1849, G/7/1a/7. Digby referred to the reluctance of the able-bodied in the countryside to enter the workhouse and notes that they needed to be really destitute to do so: Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law', 162. Apfel and Dunkley noted that many relief applicants declined the workhouse in Bedfordshire: Apfel and Dunkley, 'English Rural Society', 58.

⁶⁸ Forms of makeshift economy discussed in the historiography include help from kin, taking in lodgers, charity, credit, crime, poaching and gleaning: S. King and A. Tomkins (eds.), *The poor in England 1700-1850: An economy of makeshifts* (Manchester: 2003).

ages. The 1841, 1851 and 1861 censuses for two sample parishes, Chiddingly in the Weald and Rottingdean on the Downs, provide evidence that people over sixty either lived with family members, lodged with other families, or took in lodgers. The 1851 census recorded whether an individual was a pauper, making it a particularly valuable source for poor relief studies. Just as the elderly rarely lived alone, paupers were also either living with family members who were themselves working, taking in lodgers, or, in only one or two cases, lodging with non-family members. There are also several examples in both parishes of two or three non-related families living in the same house.⁶⁹ The 1821 census is available for Chiddingly and shows that sharing accommodation with family members was also practised under the OPL and that in 1821 all elderly people were either living as couples or in extended families.⁷⁰

In the Weald, where poverty levels were particularly high, a number of other sources of income were available during the later nineteenth century and helped smallholders to subsist. These included basket making, hop growing, poultry farming and fruit growing. However, it is not clear to what extent these forms of economy were being practised amongst the poor by mid-century.⁷¹ Emigration was a further option that was taken up by individuals and families in the Sussex unions during the 1840s and 1850s.⁷² Clearly the poor in the study parishes had access to a range of makeshift economies under the NPL, and relief in the form of the workhouse played a role. Nevertheless, the gap, notably in the provision of outdoor relief post-1834, surely made subsistence more difficult for many.

One consequence for parishes of a fall in relief numbers was that expenditure was likely to go down. In the previous chapter quite severe cuts in spending were identified during the late-1830s when relief lists were reduced. Consideration now needs to be given to the cost of poor

⁶⁹ It was rare in either parish for people to live alone or even as couples. In 1841 in Chiddingly out of 160 households there was only one household with a single person and ten households with two people. In Rottingdean there were five one person households and eight two person households out of 180 households. In the 1851 census for Chiddingly nineteen paupers were recorded: one lived in a two person household, one was a lodger with non-family members and the remaining seventeen were living with adult children or in one case a brother. In Rottingdean in 1851 there were ten paupers; one elderly lady lived alone, one was a lodger and the remaining eight lived with adult children: ESRO, Chiddingly census, 1841, XA/19/6; Chiddingly census 1851, XA/9/9; Rottingdean census, 1841, XA/19/4; Rottingdean census 1851, XA/9/20.

⁷⁰ ESRO, Chiddingly census, 1821, LIB/503580.

⁷¹ P. Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2003), 225-228.

⁷² There are references in the boards of guardians' minute books in each union to families being financed by the guardians to emigrate to Canada, Australia and Tasmania. In West Sussex the Petworth Emigration Committee arranged for over 1,800 people to emigrate to Canada between 1832 and 1837: S. Thomas, 'Power, paternalism, patronage and philanthropy: the Wyndhams and the New Poor Law in Petworth', *Local Historian*, 32 (2002), 108.

relief during the 1840s and 1850s to assess whether it was maintained at a lower level once the NPL was established. During the first years of the NPL the study unions incurred considerable expense building new workhouses or extending existing buildings; however, these costs were largely met by selling parish properties and repaying government loans over an extended period of time. The guardians managed to cut overall expenditure by restrictions on outdoor relief numbers.

Nationally data from government reports indicates that spending on poor relief in England and Wales saw a slight rise in the early-1840s following the low point of 1837. However, it did not reach OPL levels until the 1860s despite a growing population.⁷³ Rothery's study of parishes and unions in Hertfordshire between 1830 and 1847 matches the national picture with expenditure at its lowest in 1837 and then increasing during the 1840s. The extent of increase varied intra-regionally between the Hertfordshire unions and Rothery suggests that there were fluctuations in each union during the 1840s as a result of different local factors. The Poor Law Commissioners referred to, 'the uncertain and fluctuating nature of the expenditure for the relief of the poor' in their report on the NPL in 1846.⁷⁴ A rise or fall in poor relief costs could result from a number of factors including bad weather, poor harvests, additional spending on the workhouse or a change in the size of parish populations.

To assess the situation in the 1840s and 1850s in eastern Sussex, spending on poor relief in the five NPL unions in this study is shown in Figures 6.6-6.10 below based on information from the union ledgers. These sources include the cost to each parish of outdoor relief, both cash payments and providing relief in kind such as flour; indoor relief which covered food and clothing for each pauper; and common charges of maintaining and staffing the workhouse. Where available, data for the 1830s is included to provide a comparison between the Old and New Poor Laws. There are limitations to using the ledgers as they are only available for certain years and for different periods for each union, and it is not possible to know whether spending went up or down in the intervening years. However, there are some points which can be made with confidence regarding expenditure during the first decades of the NPL. Firstly, the very

⁷³ *Tenth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales*, PP 1844, C. 589; A. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Hampshire: 2002), 79.

⁷⁴ K. Rothery, 'The Implementation and Administration of the New Poor Law in Hertfordshire c.1830-1847', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2016), 278 -283; *Twelfth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales*, PP 1846, C.704.

notable reduction in some parishes in the late-1830s discussed in Chapter Five is immediately apparent in these figures and matches Rothery’s findings and the national picture. Secondly, during the 1840s and 1850s spending did not reach the OPL levels, again mirroring the national picture. However, higher figures in the 1840s compared with the 1830s are apparent in some but not all the parishes. Moreover, spending dipped in certain years during the 1840s and 1850s to the levels of 1836-38.

Figure 6.6 Parishes in the Uckfield union in the Weald: annual expenditure in pounds

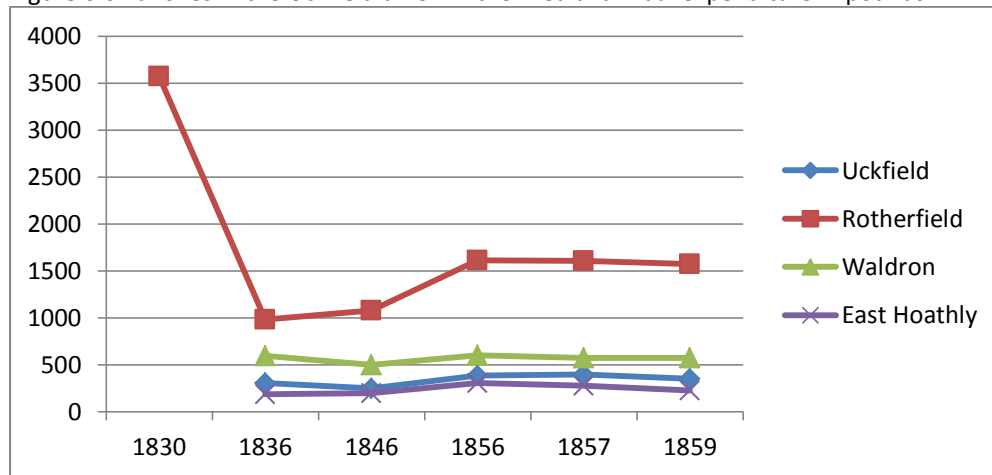


Figure 6.7 Parishes in the Hailsham union in the Weald: annual expenditure in pounds

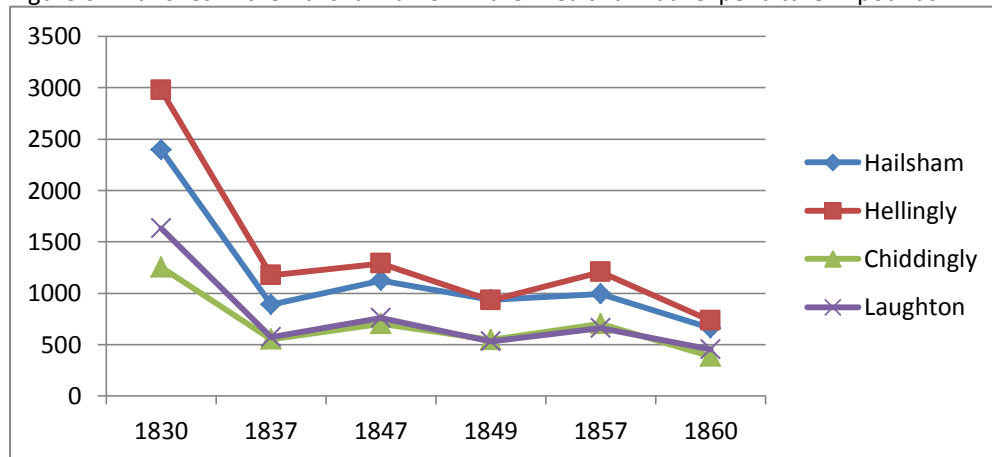


Figure 6.8 Parishes in the Newhaven union on the Downs: annual expenditure in pounds

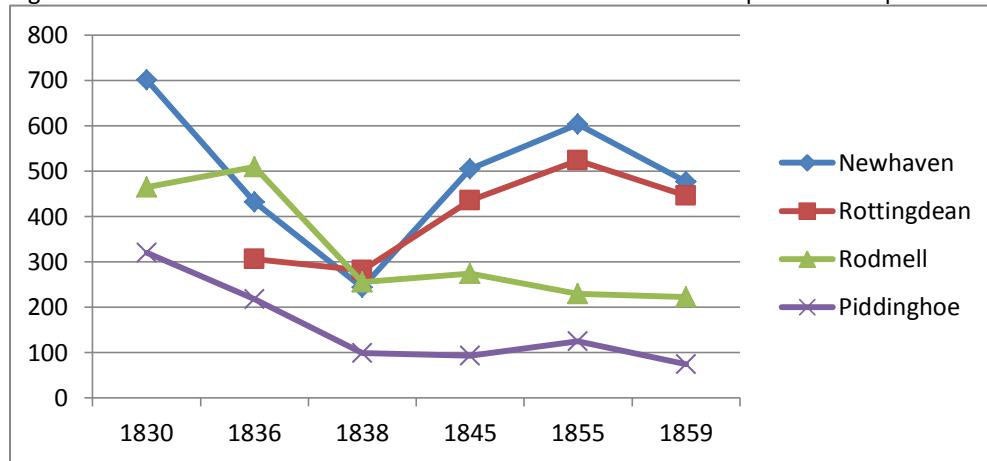


Figure 6.9 Parishes in the West Firle union at the foot of the Downs: annual expenditure in pounds

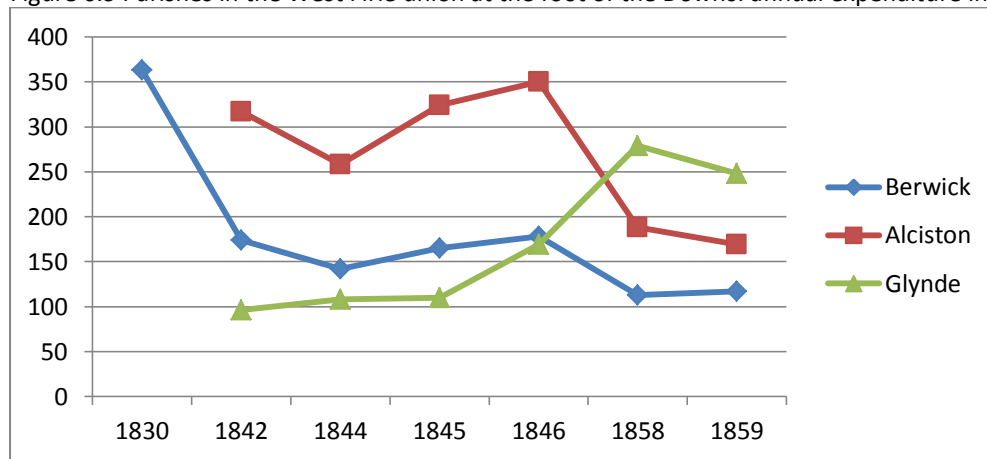
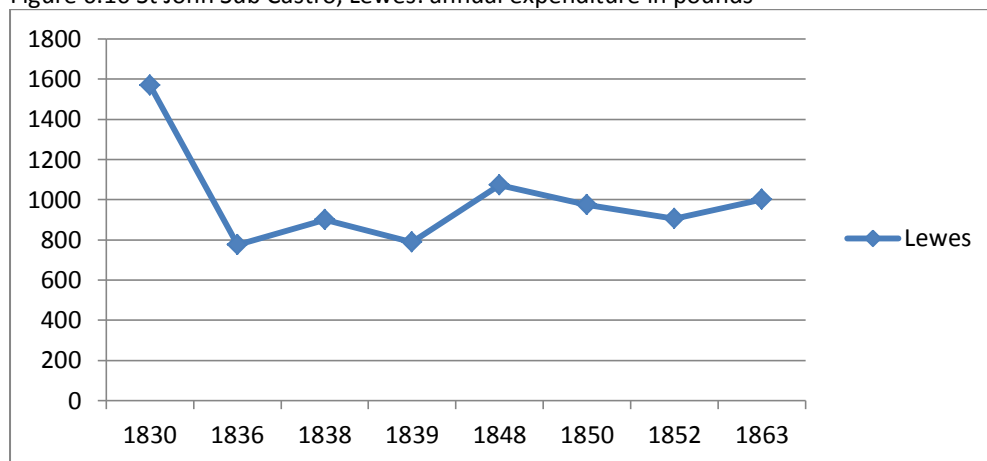


Figure 6.10 St John Sub Castro, Lewes: annual expenditure in pounds⁷⁵



In Sussex, as in Hertfordshire, there were intra-regional variations in expenditure between unions and on occasion between parishes in the same union due to varying local factors. For

⁷⁵ Data in Tables 6.6-6.10 is taken from parish and union ledgers listed in the bibliography.

example, in the Newhaven union spending was similar across the 1840s and 1850s in the two smaller parishes but there was a considerable rise in Rottingdean and in Newhaven. In the former parish, spending was low under the OPL as fewer than fifteen individuals were given relief and there was no workhouse. A combination of common charges and exceptional outdoor relief payments would explain the rise under the NPL. In Newhaven additional expenditure on poor relief might be expected as the population increased from 955 to 1886 between 1841 and 1861 as it became a railway town.⁷⁶ In the West Firle union there appears to be some variance between the parishes in Figure 6.9; however, the number of relief recipients was small in these parishes and, as has been noted so often in this study, an increase in one family could have a noticeable effect on results. In Glynde there was an average spend of two to three pounds a quarter in 1846 compared with twenty-five pounds a quarter in 1858. This can be explained by an increase from two to three paupers in 1846 to sixteen in 1858 which may have equated to one or two more families.

When assessing expenditure under the OPL in Chapter Four, the number of ratepayers and the rate levels were discussed for each parish. Survival of rate books for the NPL period in eastern Sussex is minimal. However, they are available for four of the study parishes for certain years in the 1840s: Hailsham, Laughton, Newhaven and Berwick. The rate in the pound was lower in all four parishes in the 1840s compared with 1831. The cut was most severe in the downland parish of Berwick where the rates were 9s. 3d. over the year in 1831 but only 2s. in 1848. In Newhaven they were 4s. a year in 1827 and 2s. a year in 1846; in Laughton the difference was 8s. in 1831 and 6s. in several years during the 1840s. It is not clear from the Hailsham rate books how many assessments there were each year making it difficult to make a comparison. The percentage of the population paying rates increased in all four parishes: by 1% in Laughton and Hailsham; 2% in Newhaven and 5% in Berwick, and there were slightly more people with property valued over £10 and two to four more people living in property valued over £100.⁷⁷ Pressure on those paying poor rates had therefore decreased following the implementation of the PLAA, partly due to cuts in expenditure and also due to an increase in the number of ratepayers.

⁷⁶ *Report of His Majesty's commissioners*; 1834; ESRO, Newhaven census, 1841, XA/19/4; Newhaven census, 1861, XA/2/10.

⁷⁷ ESRO, Berwick rate books, 1848-49, PAR 239/30/1/6; Hailsham rate books, 1841-1849, PAR 353/30/1/18-34; Laughton rate books, 1838-1849, PAR409/30/1/3-4; Newhaven rate books, 1846-47, DL/C1/1.

It was noted in the discussion above that there is no evidence in the study parishes of a notable change in indoor and outdoor relief numbers between 1840 and 1860 and the expenditure figures support this. The major reduction in relief numbers and related spending in the southeast occurred in the years immediately following the implementation of the PLAA. In some parishes in tables 6.6-6.10 spending was slightly lower by 1859/60 yet in Lewes it increased in 1863. It is likely that some fluctuations continued during the 1860s. Further significant alterations to the relief system, notably to outdoor relief, might be expected by the early-1870s as a result of the Crusade against Outdoor Relief. However, the administration of relief during the later nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this study.⁷⁸

Responsibility for expenditure on poor relief was in the hands of the NPL guardians and focus now switches to the work of officials, both local guardians and Central Commissioners and Inspectors, who had begun to play an important part in the management of poor relief by the 1840s and 1850s. The following discussion considers the developing role of local officials as the NPL became established. Questions are addressed regarding the motivation and conflicting priorities of the guardians in Sussex. Their relationship with the Commissioners in London and the relative power of local officials and the Central Authority is analysed. An important aspect of the guardians' work was management of the NPL workhouses and the final section of this chapter will look in more detail at conditions for the poor, in particular the indoor poor. Both local and government records under the NPL provide more detail about support and conditions in the workhouses than about outdoor support. The records also include the voices of the poor as letters to both local and central officials are referenced in the union boards of guardians' minute books and the Commissioners' papers. Pauper agency during the 1840s and 1850s will therefore be considered. As noted in Chapter Five, there was a degree of uniformity in the running of the workhouses and in this final section the unions are considered collectively.

In the following analysis of the role of poor law guardians, it is argued that for some men their work reflected a growing sense of civic duty. To a certain extent this had also been true of the

⁷⁸ The Crusade against Outdoor Relief involved co-operation between poor law guardians and charities to seek out the 'undeserving poor' and only offer the workhouse. This was not dissimilar to the aims of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834; however, in 1869 the Charity Organisation Society was founded which had the manpower to carry out assessments of relief claimants. Brundage noted that the Crusade was more successful in parts of London and a number of Midland and north-western cities while some provincial and rural areas remained virtually untouched. It is therefore possible that the Crusade had less impact on the unions in this study. Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 112-117.

OPL overseers. The discussion of Sussex overseers in Chapter Four found that they were often prominent individuals in their parish who demonstrated a sense of responsibility for their fellow parishioners and held office over many years. Individuals in the smaller parishes such as John Ellman in Glynde and the Beards and Saxbys in Rottingdean and Rodmell were tenant farmers who employed the majority of the men in their villages. A similar situation was also apparent in larger parishes such as St John Sub Castro in Lewes where Thomas Tourle was a long-term overseer and churchwarden and a major tenant farmer, and in Hailsham where Richard King Sampson, a farmer and key employer, was overseer for much of the 1820s and early-1830s.⁷⁹

All of the men mentioned above were elected as guardians under the NPL and there was continuity in office-holding in many of the parishes in this study, both when the unions were first established, and during the following two decades. For example, the parishioners of Uckfield elected Edward Kennard and Alex Cheale as guardians from 1835 until 1858 and in Newhaven Thomas Stone was chosen to represent the parish for the same period. Several guardians had the same surname in parishes across the years indicating that the office was retained within families. In all the parishes during the 1840s and 1850s individuals took on the role of guardian for two or more years, although not always consecutive years.⁸⁰ Ex-officio members who sat on the boards of guardians from the ranks of the landowning classes were also involved in the unions for several years during the 1840s and 1850s. The Earl of Chichester, the Earl of Liverpool and to a lesser extent Lord Gage, continued to play a prominent role acting as chairman when present, although they were not regular attenders.⁸¹

The guardians and board members in the study unions were therefore men of status in their parish. The role provided them with an opportunity to demonstrate paternalistic care for their parishioners; it was also a means of exerting authority in the community and essentially they

⁷⁹ The role of overseer was maintained under the NPL. Their responsibilities could include collecting the poor rates, drawing up lists of parishioners excused paying the poor rates and arranging apprenticeships. In some parishes the same individual might hold the office of overseer and guardian at different times. This was the case in Piddinghoe where Mr Tompsett was overseer in 1860 and guardian in the late-1850s: TNA, MH 12/13049.

⁸⁰ K. Rothery found that one third of guardians in the Hertfordshire unions served for four or more years: Rothery, 'The Implementation', 165.

⁸¹ The Earl of Chichester chaired the Newhaven board meetings over a long period of time, from 1836 until the 1850s but sometimes did not attend for two or three months. The Earl of Liverpool chaired the Uckfield union meetings from 1836 until 1851 when he died but again was absent from meetings for several weeks at a time. Lord Gage attended infrequently and did not always chair the meetings when he was present.

could ensure that rate levels and expenditure were kept under control. The motivation for acting as a guardian may have varied slightly; for example, between rural and town parishes. The overseers' personal relationship with the poor in some of the small downland parishes under the OPL was noted in Chapter Four. It may have been more difficult to maintain this approach when working alongside guardians from other parishes, although Hurren found that the officials in the Brixworth union continued to dispense additional benefits to mitigate poverty and maintain social relations.⁸² In the town of Lewes the guardians came from a wider range of occupations including a surveyor, hotel keeper and builder. While these figures may not have shared the paternalism of some of the rural farmers, they were certainly anxious to maintain authority in the role of local relief administrators as demonstrated by their hostility towards the Central Authority which was discussed in the previous chapter. In parishes where occupations encompassed both farming and trade, such as Newhaven and Uckfield, officials had different backgrounds. Thomas Stone was a coal merchant in Newhaven and Edward Kennard was a maltster and Alex Cheale a builder from Uckfield. These men may also have been keen to maintain local control over the increasing range of responsibilities covered by the guardians.

As the NPL became established in the Sussex unions, the remit of the guardians broadened to encompass a number of duties in addition to providing relief. Their work might involve playing an influential role in the community but it could also be demanding and time consuming. The union boards had overall charge of increasingly large workhouse establishments with the accompanying responsibility for the sick poor, for vagrants and for appropriately placing the mentally ill.⁸³ From 1836 the guardians were in charge of keeping track of all births, marriages and deaths; they also had to ensure that parishioners were vaccinated and that conditions in the workhouses, and more widely in their neighbourhood, were free from nuisances and

⁸² Hurren, *Protesting*, 99. K. Snell argued that the farmer guardians used their authority for their own economic benefit to lower wages and they also used it in a punitive manner against those 'obnoxious' to themselves: Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England* (Cambridge: 1985), 116.

⁸³ Under the NPL guardians would pay for parishioners to be placed in an asylum if it was felt that they were too unwell to cope in the workhouse. Approximately five to ten individuals were supported in an asylum from each of the study unions. The asylums included Warburton, Kent and Bethnal Green. It cost 12s. a week for a place in the Warburton Asylum: ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1852-56, G/6/1a/5. It was considerably more expensive to place a pauper in an asylum than in the workhouse. It cost 4d. a day for a pauper in the Newhaven workhouse: ESRO, Newhaven minutes, 1840-42, G/7/1a/4.

disease.⁸⁴ Meetings involved negotiating a constant flow of regulations from the Commissioners; dealing with requests and sometimes complaints from parishioners (see discussion below); negotiating with other unions about the settlement status of paupers; checking on vaccinations and managing staffing issues. Aspects of the guardians' work, which was unpaid, could be repetitive and sometimes tedious and challenging.

It is therefore not surprising that not all the guardians or ex-officio members attended regularly. The boards met weekly or fortnightly during the 1840s and 1850s but it was rare to have full attendance at union meetings. Rothery found that in Hertfordshire only a small number of officials attended most sessions and they were generally members of the gentry and clergy.⁸⁵ In the larger unions in Sussex there were often ten or more guardians present suggesting that approximately half were in attendance. In the smaller Newhaven union there were occasions when meetings were adjourned as only one person turned up, notably during the very busy farming schedule in the summer months. However, regular attenders in Sussex represented a range of backgrounds including some gentry, clergy and tradesmen, but predominantly farmers. They tended to be the same men who held office for several years thus demonstrating a dedication to public service.

Regular commitment to the administration of poor relief and the accompanying duties of a guardian are all the more impressive considering the difficult challenges they faced; notably the management of the workhouses and dealing with staffing issues. Guardians employed five or six staff in the workhouses and worked with Relieving Officers, Medical Officers and chaplains. During the mid-nineteenth century there tended to be a high turn-over of workhouse staff who generally had few qualifications and whose living conditions were only slightly better than the indoor poor.⁸⁶ In all five study unions the guardians regularly dealt with staff leaving or being dismissed and they often experienced difficulties finding replacements. In the West Fille

⁸⁴ In 1836 registration of births, marriages and deaths became compulsory. The Vaccination Act of 1840 provided for free vaccinations for the poor to be administered by the poor law unions. The Nuisance Removal and Diseases Prevention Act of 1848 decreed that the guardians should be responsible for removing nuisances and controlling epidemics. Flinn argued that the guardians were unequal to this burden; in the Nuisance Removal Act of 1855 these responsibilities were given to the vestries: M. Flinn, 'Medical Services under the Poor Law' in D. Fraser (ed), *The New Poor Law*, 52. The Lewes minutes record that parishes were requested to form committees to follow the regulations of the 1855 act: ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1852-56, G/6/1a/5.

⁸⁵ Snell also referred to the high absentee rate of guardians in many unions with between ten to forty per cent present: Snell, *Annals*, 117.

⁸⁶ Crowther stated that workhouse masters were often overworked, uneducated and unsupervised: Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 119.

workhouse between 1847 and 1849 the workhouse master, a teacher and a porter all left their positions.⁸⁷ In the Uckfield union in 1843 when the porter and nurse left their employment, the school master and mistress offered to take their place if the salary was increased demonstrating how little qualifications mattered.⁸⁸ The guardians accepted the offer, appointed a new school teacher but within months had to dismiss the teacher for incompetence.⁸⁹ There are a number of references in the records to workhouse staff being dismissed due to bad conduct.⁹⁰

There were also disputes between boards of guardians and staff outside of the workhouse. Medical Officers in the Uckfield and West Firle unions complained about their workload and pay.⁹¹ The Collector (of poor rates) for the Uckfield union contacted the Poor Law Board in 1852 as he felt he was overworked and underpaid; the board suggested that the rates should be collected every six months rather than three months which the collector accepted.⁹² The Hailsham guardians were criticised by a relieving officer for not administering vaccines correctly and they also had to deal with a union clerk who misappropriated funds.⁹³

As the work of the guardians broadened, they came under increasing surveillance. It was observed in Chapter Five that their decisions could come under public scrutiny.⁹⁴ Criticism of local poor relief came from the press and from individuals.⁹⁵ In 1842 *The Times* included an article criticising the appointment of a new governor in St Anne's, the children's workhouse in Lewes. The guardians responded that there was no foundation to the story. In 1859 the Hailsham minutes refer to a newspaper report criticising the workhouse schoolmaster for punishing a boy inappropriately. At their meeting the clerk recorded that the guardians did not

⁸⁷ TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190.

⁸⁸ ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1842-45, G/11/1a/3.

⁸⁹ The standard of teaching improved slightly after 1848 when a government grant was established to help pay for workhouse teachers. The teachers had to demonstrate a level of competence for the grant to be paid.

⁹⁰ The Uckfield union guardians dismissed the school master and mistress: ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1842-45, G/11/1a/3. The Hailsham union guardians dismissed the workhouse master for inappropriate behaviour: TNA, Hailsham, 1841-47, MH 12/12933. The Lewes guardians dismissed the workhouse master: ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1856-59, G/6/1a/6.

⁹¹ ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1854-58, G/11/1a/6; NA, MH 12/13190, West Firle 1847-54.

⁹² ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1857-59, G/5/1a/7.

⁹³ *Ibid.* ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1859-61, G/5/1a/7-8.

⁹⁴ The reference in Chapter Five was to the Earl of Liverpool who, when agreeing to an amputation in the workhouse, noted that the public were watching the actions of the guardians.

⁹⁵ Jones and King referred to the increasing power of the press in broadening participation in 'the formation of 'public opinion': Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 15.

agree with the report. Nevertheless, such incidents could still reflect badly on officials.⁹⁶ The local vicar, Reverend Edwards, was critical of the standard of teaching in the Uckfield workhouse school while his successor queried the quality of food given to elderly inmates.⁹⁷ Medical Officers frequently challenged the guardians in each union over issues such as workhouse diet and ventilation in the buildings.

However, the greatest scrutiny of the guardians' work came from the Commissioners in London. As the NPL became established, involvement from the Poor Law Commissioners, and after 1847 The Poor Law Board, also increased. This took the form of issuing regulations, carrying out investigations and deploying Poor Law Inspectors who were expected to visit each union twice annually.⁹⁸ This raises vital questions regarding the balance of power between local officials and the Central Authority during the 1840s and 1850s. When the NPL was introduced in the Sussex unions in this study, there was some opposition, notably in the town of Lewes, and to a lesser extent in Hailsham. Yet, once up and running, the new boards of guardians in all of the unions complied with most of the Commissioners' regulations. To a certain extent they had shared interests in maintaining social order and reducing relief costs. At the same time the guardians demonstrated a desire to maintain some local practices such as relieving non-resident paupers and deciding which member of a household should enter the workhouse.

In Chapter Five it was suggested that when trying to maintain local practices the guardians appeared more sympathetic towards the poor than Assistant Commissioners such as W. Hawley. However, as the NPL became established this situation was less clear cut. More enlightened Poor Law Inspectors were anxious to improve conditions for paupers despite the cost, which could bring them into conflict with the guardians who had contending priorities. While local officials might favour better care, notably for the deserving poor such as the elderly and children, they also needed to contain expenditure. In eastern Sussex during the 1840s and early-1850s two Inspectors, Grenville Pigott and Edward Tufnell, were keen to improve facilities within the workhouses. Both men were interested in education, the welfare of children, and

⁹⁶ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1839-43, G/6/1a/2; Hailsham minutes, 1857-59, G/5/1a/7. It is not possible to tell from the local records who told the press about these issues. It may have been an inmate after they left the workhouse or a visitor to the workhouse such as a chaplain.

⁹⁷ ESRO, Uckfield minutes; 1839-42, G11/1a/2; 1854-58, G/11/1a/6.

⁹⁸ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 115.

standards of health and hygiene, and these concerns are evident in their reports.⁹⁹ Recommendations from the Inspectors to all the unions included wider provision of teaching equipment, more industrial training for boys, and increased space and ventilation in the buildings.¹⁰⁰ The reaction of the local officials tended to go some way to meet the Inspectors' requirements but their actions were tempered by concerns regarding the cost of improvements. Hence, in Lewes the guardians lowered the walls of the children's workhouse to improve ventilation rather than provide a separate sick ward in 1842 while in the Uckfield union the chapel was converted into more bedrooms rather than building an extension to the workhouse.¹⁰¹

It should be remembered that from the outset of the NPL guardians themselves were also responsible for setting up workhouse visiting committees made up of board members. Reports of these visits are referenced in the union minute books but rarely include details of the visits. Crowther notes that the Central Authority complained that guardians took their duties of workhouse visitation lightly.¹⁰² In 1842 the Lewes union visiting committee was criticised by the Commissioners for not visiting the workhouses every week. It was agreed that there would be weekly meetings and more attention should be given to the care of the sick when visiting. The Hailsham union minute book at the end of the 1830s includes some comments on workhouse visits such as a concern for the state of the water closet, criticism of the master for being off the premises too often and the poor quality of some of the food. However, the visiting committee did not recommend large projects such as building new rooms or wards.¹⁰³ Given the guardians' concerns regarding the cost of relief, they were less likely than the Inspectors to identify problems that needed remedying in the workhouses.

If guardians in Sussex were restrained in their actions by a need to keep the poor rates as low as possible, it could be argued that this concern for ratepayers' money was a responsible action and part of their civic duty. However, some union boards have been accused in the

⁹⁹ Copies of their reports are available in the Central Authority papers and reference was often made to Inspectors' visits in the boards of guardians' minute books.

¹⁰⁰ A lack of industrial training was cited in all of the unions except Hailsham where the guardians had bought woodland for the able-bodied men and boys to work in: TNA, Hailsham, 1854-59, MH 12/12938. Outbreaks of disease including measles, scarlet fever and cholera occurred within the unions in this study during the 1840s and 1850s.

¹⁰¹ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1839-1843, G/6/1a/2; Uckfield minutes, G/11/1a/6.

¹⁰² Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 118.

¹⁰³ TNA, Lewes, 1843-47, MH 12/13107; ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1836-38, G/5/1a/1.

historiography of being over-zealous in their attempts to control spending, and there are examples of this in Sussex.¹⁰⁴ In Newhaven in 1843 there was a dispute between the Earl of Chichester and other members of the board because the latter wished to reduce the salaries of the workhouse master and matron from sixty pounds to fifty pounds and the salaries of the porter and schoolmistress from twenty pounds to eighteen pounds arguing that their actions were due to, 'economy in distribution of union funds'. The Earl resigned and was supported by the Poor Law Commissioners. After several weeks' negotiation, the guardians reluctantly agreed to retain the salaries at their present level and the Earl returned to the board meetings.¹⁰⁵ However, there are also examples of officials in the study unions demonstrating a wish to make good use of the available resources and provide support to the poor. On a number of occasions, the Lewes guardians tried to persuade families to come into the workhouses for the sake of their childrens' health due to squalid conditions at home. Officials in the Hailsham union purchased woodland which provided employment for able-bodied men so that they need not go into the workhouse, and industrial training for the boys in the workhouse. The Newhaven guardians, who wished to reduce staff salaries, personally paid for the Christmas dinners of the indoor poor.¹⁰⁶

While officials in the study unions were concerned by the expense of some recommendations made by the Central Authority, they were also worried that a centralised body in London was attempting to 'interfere' in local matters. On some occasions the guardians refused to comply with regulations or recommendations from the Commissioners and this demonstrates that the actual power of the Central Authority was limited. Crowther cites examples of unions in Shropshire and Nottinghamshire where guardians refused to obey instructions from London, and in Chapter Five of this study reference was made to the refusal from some unions in

¹⁰⁴ The guardians in Durham when under pressure from a downturn in the local economy adopted strict measures to curtail spending. They rejected a number of requests for exceptional relief and made increasing use of the workhouse while at the same time imposing cuts to workhouse expenditure such as restricting the diet, contrary to the advice of the Commissioners: Dunkley, 'The 'Hungry Forties''. Flinn argued that the parsimony of some guardians could lead to minimal expenditure on workhouse infirmaries which were often located in old buildings with inadequate facilities: Flinn, 'Medical Services', 55.

¹⁰⁵ The Earl of Chichester attended the meetings again but did not return to being chairman for a year: ESRO, Newhaven minutes, 1842-44, G/7/1a/5.

¹⁰⁶ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1848-51, G/6/1a/4; TNA, Hailsham, 1854-59, MH 12/12938; ESRO, Newhaven minutes, 1846-49, G/7/1a/7.

Lancashire and Wales to build a workhouse.¹⁰⁷ In Sussex the Commissioners tried to persuade the Hailsham guardians to take down the extended Hellingly workhouse in 1843 and erect a building on a new site as the present site was causing issues with drainage, but the guardians decided to ignore this advice and carry out drainage work on the original site. In the following year the Hailsham board refused to end the provision of outdoor relief for non-resident poor.¹⁰⁸ The Uckfield officials were asked by Pigott on several occasions to meet weekly rather than fortnightly but replied that, 'they will go ahead with fortnightly meetings', and were still meeting every two weeks in the winter and summer in the 1850s.¹⁰⁹ Pigott complained about the lack of training for boys in the West Firle workhouse in 1848 and he was making the same point in 1855 indicating that no training had been put in place.¹¹⁰

The Lewes officials in particular continued to object to interference in local affairs. They possibly attracted more criticism because they retained the OPL workhouses with minimal adaptations. In fact the decision not to build a new workhouse in 1836 may well have been made by the Lewes tradesmen as part of their resistance to the NPL. As discussed above, during the 1840s and 1850s the Inspectors requested improvements which were only partly met. Ultimately in 1857 Pigott recommended that a new workhouse should be built because of over-crowding and bad ventilation in the old buildings.¹¹¹ The guardians met with Pigott and argued that they had already spent a lot of money on improvements. They would only consider additional expenditure if some of the surrounding country parishes shared the cost. They also argued that the elderly were better cared for in a separate institution.¹¹² The following year Pigott attended a further board meeting and suggested that a new establishment would cost

¹⁰⁷ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*, 47. However, Bradley's study of the Bromsgrove poor law union found the union to be compliant and saw the Commission as supportive rather than intrusive, Bradley, 'Welcoming the New Poor Law', 214-215.

¹⁰⁸ ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1842-43, G/5/1a/4; 1843-44, G/5/1a/5.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, Uckfield, 1852-54, MH 12/13164.

¹¹⁰ TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190; West Firle, 1855-60, MH 12/13191.

¹¹¹ In 1855 Pigott recorded that the elderly poor were sharing beds and in the able-bodied workhouse three women were sharing a bed: ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1852-56, G/6/1a/5.

¹¹² The guardians noted that many labouring poor from surrounding villages moved to Lewes as they could not obtain a cottage in their home parish: ESRO, Lewes union board of guardians' minute book, 1856-59, G/6/1a/6.

£5,000. However, the guardians would not agree and a further ten years passed before a new Lewes workhouse was built in 1868.¹¹³

This discussion has given some insight into the work of NPL officials and their views on the changes to relief legislation through the records kept by the boards of guardians and the Central Authority in London. It is less easy to learn about the experience of the poor, although some information, notably on conditions for the indoor poor, is available in both the local and central records. In the previous chapter on the Introduction of the NPL, certain aspects of workhouse life in Sussex were discussed. The workhouses in the Weald and in Lewes tended to become overcrowded although in some, but not all, workhouses there was separate accommodation for the elderly. Children were given schooling of a varying standard and boys were also expected to work. Employment given to able-bodied men could be tough with long hours. The able-bodied tended to make short-term use of the workhouse in times of crisis. There are examples of bullying and bad treatment in the records, and some children could have been vulnerable as they did not have the option to leave.

All of these aspects of workhouse life continued to be evident once the NPL had become established in Sussex.¹¹⁴ The two issues of either going 'in and out' of the workhouse, or of spending many years there when young, were proving particularly problematic to officials in the study unions by the 1840s and 1850s. The guardians from Lewes, West Firle and Newhaven complained to the Commissioners on various occasions that some able-bodied poor were discharging themselves and then being readmitted shortly afterwards.¹¹⁵ The guardians from both the Uckfield and West Firle unions were concerned that they were unable to persuade some young able-bodied poor to leave the workhouse. Young men who had grown up in the Uckfield workhouse were reluctant to leave as they had no accommodation or employment; this situation was resolved in 1854 when they were placed in the army.¹¹⁶ In Firle the problem was that there were no cottages for families to rent and consequently able-bodied families

¹¹³ As noted in Chapter Two, in West Sussex the Petworth Union resisted the Poor Law Commissioners' regulations and continued to provide support to able-bodied labourers outside the workhouse: S. Thomas, 'Power, paternalism'.

¹¹⁴ Able-bodied men continued to operate mills and crush bones in the Sussex workhouses: TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190. The Newhaven guardians obtained permission from the Poor Law Commission to continue bone crushing after the Andover scandal. They argued that there was, 'no filthy practice' here and that 'other local unions share our sentiment': ESRO, Newhaven minutes, 1844-46, G/7/1a/6.

¹¹⁵ TNA, Lewes, 1843-47, MH 12/13017; West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190; Newhaven, 1843-47, MH 12/13047.

¹¹⁶ TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190; Uckfield, 1852-54, MH 12/13164.

were remaining in the workhouse. The response from the Commissioners to all these concerns was that it was not possible to force inmates to leave the workhouse if they had no accommodation to go to.¹¹⁷ These cases demonstrate both the importance to some families of indoor relief as a form of makeshift economy and also the problems that could occur if young people who grew up in the workhouse were not found places in service, or apprenticeships.

However, there were some signs of improvements within workhouses in the mid-nineteenth century. The introduction of teachers' qualifications has already been mentioned and inspections from Tufnell and Pigott put pressure on the guardians to improve teaching and school facilities. The Uckfield union guardians decided to appoint a paid nurse rather than use a pauper to nurse the sick after complaints from other inmates (see below).¹¹⁸ In the study workhouses sick wards and infirmaries were gradually added. In the Newhaven union a new hospital with receiving and infectious wards was built adjacent to the workhouse in 1857. Even the Lewes guardians provided an infirmary for the children in 1852. They also made extensions so that able-bodied men were no longer sharing a bed in 1855 and added a children's nursery in 1856.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, Pigott noted that overcrowding continued to be an issue in the Lewes workhouses as some women were still sleeping three to a bed in 1858.¹²⁰

One important source of information on the concerns of those in receipt of poor relief is the correspondence written by the poor themselves, or their advocates, in the form of letters which were sent to the boards of guardians and the Commissioners. The value of pauper correspondence as a historical source under both the Old and New Poor laws was highlighted in Chapters Three and Four. In Chapter Five it was suggested that pauper agency, which has been identified by Peter Jones and Steven King, was in its early stages during the 1830s in the study unions. However, as the NPL became established, there is more evidence in both the boards of guardians' minute books and the Commissioners' records that the poor, both indoor and outdoor, were communicating with officials about their relief¹²¹ Unfortunately the

¹¹⁷ In the case of repeated 'ins and outs' the Commissioners suggested that paupers could be forewarned that they may not be readmitted within a certain period of time: TNA, West Firle, 1847-54, MH 12/13190. A similar problem with labourers being unable to find accommodation in the small parishes surrounding Lewes was noted above. It was suggested in Chapter Three that the downland parishes had characteristics of a closed parish where the number of cottages was restricted to discourage incomers.

¹¹⁸ ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1842-45, G/11/1a/3.

¹¹⁹ ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1852-56, G/6/1a/5.

¹²⁰ TNA, Lewes, 1854-58, MH 12/13019.

¹²¹ Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*.

guardians' minute books for this study do not contain copies of the pauper letters but they include details on the nature of their concerns and how they were dealt with. This information provides some insight into the conditions that the poor experienced, although inevitably complaints represented the negative side of relief.

Some concerns raised by paupers went straight to the guardians and were followed up. A mother in the Uckfield union workhouse made a complaint when her baby died apparently without medical attention. The medical officer was questioned but insisted that he attended the workhouse regularly and his response appears to have been accepted by the guardians.¹²² The same board took direct action when a complaint was made by a workhouse resident that a sick, elderly man had been mistreated by a pauper nurse. After interviewing several other inmates the guardians agreed to appoint a paid nurse.¹²³ Several complaints were made to the guardians about workhouse staff both from the poor and from other staff. In the Hailsham workhouse Barnes, the master, was accused by a female inmate of inappropriate behaviour and he was suspended.¹²⁴ Some issues that were raised were clearly less serious and when the schoolmistress objected to the 'annoying acts' of one of Barnes' successors towards staff, the guardians advised that the staff should, 'endeavour to be kind and forbearing towards one another'.¹²⁵

By the 1850s the number of letters that were sent directly to the Central Authority from the poor were increasing and the Commissioners' records include correspondence from paupers in each of the study unions.¹²⁶ Letters were sent to the Central Authority from both the outdoor and indoor poor. As Natalie Carter and Steven King have noted, there was a difference in the way that this correspondence was dealt with. The outdoor poor were more likely to receive an acknowledgement from the Central Authority that their letter had been received, but as the volume of correspondence increased the poor were informed that the guardians would deal with their concerns. Fewer indoor poor received a direct reply from London; they were more

¹²² ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1839-42, G/11/1a/2

¹²³ The pauper nurse was accused of wiping a mop over an elderly man's face because he was incontinent; the minutes do not record whether the pauper nurse was reprimanded: ESRO, Uckfield minutes, 1842-45, G/11/1a/3.

¹²⁴ ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1840-42, G/5/1a/3

¹²⁵ ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1857-59, G/5/1a/7.

¹²⁶ Jones and King have argued that by the 1850s the workhouse was on the public agenda and there was an increase in letters sent to the boards of guardians and the Central Authority from the poor and their advocates: Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 112.

likely to receive a response from local officials.¹²⁷ The letters to the Central Authority from the indoor poor in Sussex were followed up with varying degrees of success. Henry Dine, an elderly pauper in the Hailsham workhouse, complained of lack of nourishment. His concerns were forwarded to the guardians who responded that Dine was a 'troublesome' fellow who had been in prison, and that the medical officer had checked him, and he was healthy. However, when a complaint was made that Reuben Bull was left unattended lying on the floor of the Hailsham workhouse infirmary with the 'itch', the case was taken more seriously. Pigott raised the issue at a guardians' meeting and the medical officer was asked to write to the Poor Law Board to explain the situation.¹²⁸ The Central Authority also showed some sympathy towards Henry Harman in the Lewes workhouse when he complained that he had been put to work when unfit. The guardians maintained that Harman was of an idiotic state of mind and had only been given light work in the garden. However, the Commissioners said that he should not work for two months based on his medical certificate.¹²⁹

The Central Authority was concerned to avoid scandals regarding conditions in the workhouses, particularly after the Andover Scandal. Therefore, the Commissioners may have taken complaints from the indoor poor more seriously than those from the outdoor poor.¹³⁰ Issues raised by the latter in Sussex seem to have been largely dismissed when referred to the guardians with no further follow up from London. When John Mephram, aged sixty-seven with bad eye sight, requested an increase in his pension from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d., the Poor Law Board replied that they could not sanction relief to individuals. The Hailsham union guardians informed the board that Mephram had been in the workhouse and had been offered 1s. 6d. outdoor relief as he was a shoemaker and they felt he was capable of work. There does not appear to have been any attempt to investigate the state of Mephram's eyesight which could have affected his ability as a shoemaker.¹³¹ Similarly, when Widow Easter asked the Central Authority for an increase in her pension of 1s. 6d., the guardians responded that she owned a

¹²⁷ N. Carter and S. King, "'I think we ought not to acknowledge them [paupers] as that encourages them to write": the administrative state, power and the Victorian pauper', *Social History*, 46 (2021), 131-137.

¹²⁸ ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1857-59, G/5/1a/7. The reference to this letter is in the guardians' minute book. As the original letter is not available, it is not possible to know the author.

¹²⁹ The Commissioners' response suggests that Harman, or an advocate, had enclosed medical evidence to the Commissioners: ESRO, Lewes minutes, 1856-59, G/6/1a/6.

¹³⁰ For a discussion of the Andover scandal, see: S. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England, 1780-1850* (Manchester: 2017).

¹³¹ TNA, Hailsham, 1854-59, MH 12/12938.

small piece of land and was in good health. In Lewes Henry Bishop complained to the Poor Law Board that he had not been admitted to the workhouse but the guardians noted that Bishop was healthy and capable of looking after his family but lost work due to drunkenness.¹³²

Unless the poor sent further complaints it is unlikely that the Central Authority would question the guardians' responses. However, one outdoor complainant from Lewes had some success; Henry Stapley contacted the Central Authority saying he was destitute and the relieving officer subsequently offered him the workhouse.¹³³ Individual successes were important. As Carter and King point out, pauper letters could prove a useful means for the Central Commissioners to keep a check on processes in the localities. Moreover, a positive response tended to generate more correspondence as the poor knew that a successful outcome was a possibility. Carter and King found that most letters sent by, or on behalf of, the indoor poor demanded some form of local action, although fewer letters from the outdoor poor resulted in a change in conditions.¹³⁴ The guardians may have been reluctant to revise outdoor pensions which could have had implications for other pension rates in the union.

The Sussex records indicate that the poor had the opportunity to complain and there were those outside the relief establishment who supported them. The concerns of the outdoor poor were largely regarding their pensions, although as discussed above, some individuals requested to be taken into the workhouse. The concerns of the indoor poor often involved allegations of mistreatment from members of staff. The letters demonstrate that conditions for the indoor poor during the 1840s and 1850s could still be difficult, particularly if they were managed by individuals who were at best unsympathetic and at worst cruel. At the same time paupers could have 'played the system'. The guardians' comments that certain complainants were difficult characters may have been justified in some cases and further demonstrates the challenges of their work.

Conclusion

This chapter has questioned whether there was a change in the number of people in receipt of relief, and in expenditure on relief, once the NPL had become established in eastern Sussex,

¹³² ESRO, Hailsham minutes, 1846-47, G/5/1a/6. TNA, Lewes, 1854-48, MH 12/13019.

¹³³ TNA, Lewes, 1848-52, MH 12/13018.

¹³⁴ Carter and King, "I think we ought not to acknowledge them", 142-144.

and has found that both were relatively stable during the 1840s and 1850s.¹³⁵ The main change in the distribution of poor relief after 1834 occurred during the late-1830s when the number of people given outdoor support was cut and it was this reduction that led to a fall in spending despite the costs of providing new or enlarged workhouses. The situation in Sussex matched the national picture soon after the implementation of the PLAA. During the next two decades neither relief numbers nor spending returned to the high levels witnessed under the OPL. Yet, nationally there were signs of an increase in the provision of outdoor relief during the 1840s, possibly as a result of a more relaxed approach on the part of the guardians, and this was evident in some of the Sussex parishes including Hailsham and Chiddingly in the Weald where numbers came close to, but did not match, those at the end of the OPL. The intra-regional variations in relief numbers and spending under the OPL, noted in Chapter Four, continued into the mid-nineteenth century with higher levels persisting in the Weald.

After 1834 the profile of the outdoor poor changed in Sussex as pensions were restricted to the 'deserving poor', the elderly, infirm, widows and children. The able-bodied were given exceptional relief in the form of medical support, but this was generally short-term and did not match the payments distributed under the OPL. Recipients of exceptional relief were in nearly all cases male agricultural labourers. A higher proportion of labourers received this support in the Weald and there are indications that the guardians, who were predominantly farmers, may have given some relief 'ostensibly' due to sickness in order to maintain men during times of underemployment.¹³⁶ This would support studies by Digby and Bradley. In Lewes numbers of exceptional relief recipients were proportionately lower as there were far fewer agricultural labourers in the town. In Sussex, as in Hertfordshire, there were variations in outdoor relief numbers and spending between parishes within unions, which could be due to a number of local factors such as health and mortality, changes in parish populations and local employment opportunities.

A reduction in people being given outdoor relief might be expected to have resulted in an increase in the number of indoor poor which was anticipated by the Poor Law Commissioners.

¹³⁵ There are some signs that outdoor and indoor numbers may have fallen slightly by the late-1850s. In thirteen out of sixteen parishes outdoor numbers were lower and indoor numbers in the unions with available data were also lower. However, numbers constantly fluctuated and without similar detailed studies for comparison it is not possible to be conclusive.

¹³⁶ This would suggest that in parts of Sussex the guardians faced similar problems to the guardians in East Anglia and in Bromsgrove: Digby, 'The New Poor Law'; Bradley, 'Welcoming the New Poor Law'.

However, in the study unions there was not a notable rise in indoor numbers in the decades following 1834. The wealden and Lewes workhouses were often full and overcrowded compared with the downland workhouses which did not reach capacity. However, this was due to much higher populations in the former unions and in fact the proportion of parishioners in each union who made use of the workhouses was similar, between 1% and 3%, again matching the national picture. In some, but not all, unions the number of indoor poor had dropped slightly by the late-1850s.

The profile of the indoor poor under the NPL was similar to that of the OPL with proportionately more children and elderly men; although there was a more even balance of children, elderly and able-bodied paupers in the downland unions and the town of Lewes. These findings support those of other studies of workhouse populations in the southeast.¹³⁷ There was a slight increase in the number of able-bodied indoor poor but they tended to spend short periods of time in the workhouse and made use of it as part of their makeshift economy. Able-bodied men in the workhouses tended to be single, agricultural labourers. As with the outdoor poor, the numbers of indoor poor fluctuated but were generally higher in the winter and during periods of bad weather and unemployment. The profile of indoor paupers highlights the vulnerability of agricultural labourers in areas where there was underemployment and seasonal employment, such as the Weald. In the wealden unions high numbers of children were admitted to the workhouse to help large agricultural families, elderly male labourers often entered due to poor health and young men sought indoor relief when struggling to find regular work. The difficulties faced by agricultural labourers have been emphasised throughout this study. They were an issue under the OPL and continued to be a problem under the NPL during the 1840s and 1850s.

This chapter has also asked questions about the developing relationship between local officials and the Central Commission during the mid-nineteenth century to assess the relative balance of power. The local guardians and Central Commissioners shared similar aims in wishing to contain spending on relief and to maintain social order. However, officials in Sussex were wary of any interference from London in local affairs. The role of the guardians broadened during the 1840s and 1850s to encompass a range of duties and they wished to maintain control over

¹³⁷ Crowther, *The Workhouse System*; Nigel Goose, 'Workhouse Populations'; A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, 'The Populations'.

local governance. Thus, they complied with the Central Authority's regulations up to a point but resisted certain directives, demonstrating the limitations of the Commissioners' authority. The guardians were not only motivated by concerns over the poor rates and maintaining control over local affairs. Several exhibited a paternalistic concern for their parishioners and it has been argued in this discussion that for a number of the Sussex officials their work reflected a growing sense of civic duty. This was demonstrably the case for men who held office over an extended period of time, including those who acted as overseer under the OPL and who attended meetings regularly.

Finally, the discussion in this chapter turned to the experience of the poor, notably in the workhouses during the mid-nineteenth century. As argued by Jones and King, any change in workhouse establishments seemed to take a considerable time, and conditions discussed in Chapter Five still prevailed in the 1840s and 1850s. When any form of improvement took place, such as in schooling or care of the sick, it was often prompted by outside surveillance from Poor Law Inspectors and locals involved in the poor relief system such as vicars or medical officers. However, the poor were also able to play their part through letters of complaint or request for change. The Sussex evidence supports the findings of Jones and King that the poor could have an effective voice, although in the study unions they had to contend with guardians who were often reluctant to support the claims made by individual paupers.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 111.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This thesis has done something new within welfare studies by examining a range of communities over an extended period of time prior to, and following, 1834 in order to assess the impact of the PLAA on both the poor and on relief officials. It was argued in Chapter One that in order to try to understand the problems of poverty it is essential to consider the experience of individuals, both those in receipt of relief and those administering it. Several questions have been addressed concerning the causes, effects and solutions to poverty which also have relevance to the same issues in contemporary society. Inter-regional and intra-regional differences are one aspect of poverty that is clearly evident today and was apparent two hundred years ago. Eastern Sussex with its varied geographical regions was an exemplar of such variations when the PLAA was implemented. This research has demonstrated the extent and nature of such differences. The breadth and depth of this study has made it possible to contribute to several debates within the historiography and to provide important new insights into poor relief during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. These are summarised below. This concluding chapter also considers Sussex's place within the broader picture of welfare in the southeast.

The PLAA was created partly as a reaction to the increasing number of people on the relief lists and the consequent cost to the ratepayers. It was therefore important to begin this thesis by asking questions about the number and profile of relief recipients during the final decades of the OPL and trace any changes across those years. Through analysis of all available overseers' records for the parishes in this study it has been possible to assess the percentage of the population in receipt of relief for sample communities in the Weald, on the Downs and in the town of Lewes between the late-1800s and 1834. In several wealden parishes the numbers ranged from thirty per cent of the population including dependents in the early-1800s to between fifty and just under seventy per cent of the population by the early-1820s. However, in the smaller downland parishes and Lewes the figure was below twenty per cent across the period and showed no obvious rise. These latter figures are similar to Williams' findings in two Bedfordshire parishes where for most of this period less than eighteen per cent of the parish

populations received poor relief.¹ Results from the first stage of this study highlight the very high levels of demand on the welfare system in the Sussex Weald. In two of the wealden parishes with records for the late-eighteenth century the increase in paupers had begun by the 1790s, a decade which witnessed a series of poor harvests and high food costs. Baugh's argument that there were discrete periods within the final decades of the OPL when relief numbers peaked is supported by the findings from this study, although peaks occurred at slightly different times across the parishes, and the increase in the number of paupers reflected a long-term trend in parts of eastern Sussex.²

However, there was a complex picture with not only intra-regional variations but also differences between contiguous parishes, which bears out Hindle's projections under the early OPL.³ Not every parish fitted the pattern of high relief numbers in the Weald and low numbers in the parishes on or close to the Downs. Once again it has been possible to measure the extent of such differences. In Berwick at the foot of the Downs seventy-five per cent of the population were in receipt of relief by 1818 while in neighbouring Glynde it was only nine per cent. Within the Weald in the parish of Rotherfield between twenty and twenty-five per cent of the population were on the relief lists by 1818 compared with more than fifty per cent in other wealden parishes. Such differences may have been partly due to individual parish policies and these are discussed below.

In order to understand the rise in relief numbers and variations between parishes it is important to consider the profile of the poor. Several historians including King, French and Stapleton have discussed the changing profile of paupers which included more male-headed families during the final years of the OPL, particularly in rural regions. However, this did not apply everywhere. Ottaway found little evidence of any increase in younger families on the relief lists in Puddletown, Dorset, at the end of the eighteenth century and Neuman noted that the number of able-bodied males in receipt of relief remained small within sixteen Berkshire parishes between 1795 and 1834.⁴ In eastern Sussex there was also a varied picture. In the

¹ S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law 1760-1834* (Suffolk: 2011), 54.

² D. Baugh, 'The Cost of Poor Relief in South-East England, 1790-1834', *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975), 50-68.

³ S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: 2004), 283.

⁴ S. King, *Poverty and welfare in England 1700-1850: A regional perspective* (Manchester: 2000); H. French, 'How dependent were the "dependent poor"? Poor relief and the life-course in Terling, Essex, 1762-1834', *Continuity and Change*, 30 (2015), 193-222; B. Stapleton, 'Inherited Poverty and Life-Cycle Poverty: Odiham, Hampshire, 1650-1850', *Social History*, 18 (1993), 339-355; S. Ottaway, 'Providing for the elderly in eighteenth-century

wealden parishes while those who traditionally received relief, the deserving poor including the elderly, disabled and children continued to receive regular pensions, able-bodied men were added to the lists, during the late-OPL, albeit generally with less regular support. By using data from censuses it has been possible to demonstrate that the inclusion of agricultural labourers and their families on the relief lists accounted for the increasing number of relief recipients. As noted above, the rise in the number of paupers was less apparent in Lewes. That can most likely be explained by the small proportion of working men employed in agriculture (only nine per cent).

Yet, there were also high numbers of men working as agricultural labourers in the downland parishes but the number of people on the relief lists was far lower. This study argues that the increase in agricultural labourers requesting support in the Weald was due to the poorer farming conditions, and this supports Langton's findings that geography could be an important factor in determining levels of poor relief.⁵ On the Downs there were far larger, wealthier farms which were able to maintain a regular workforce. One reason why Sussex spent more on poor relief than most other counties is that there were few alternative industries to agriculture and many families were entirely dependent on farming for a living. In the Weald there was not always enough work for labourers during periods of economic downturn, or spells of bad weather which made the clay soil unworkable. This research has also found that the structure of a parish as 'open' or 'closed' could be a significant factor in determining levels of relief under the OPL. Several wealden parishes in this study fit the definition of an 'open' parish with larger, scattered settlements and several smaller scale employers, while some of the downland parishes fit the definition of a 'closed' parish with one or two major landowners providing employment, limited housing and a stable population. This supports the work of Byung Song who found that more 'open' parishes in Oxfordshire had higher levels of spending on relief, and the fact that very little work has been carried out into this aspect of poor relief once again emphasises the value of an approach such as this.⁶

England', *Continuity and Change*, 13 (1998), 391-318; M. Neuman, *The Speenhamland County: Poverty and the Poor Laws in Berkshire, 1781-1834* (London: 1982).

⁵ J. Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief in Rural Oxfordshire 1775-1832', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Newcastle upon Tyne: 2015).

⁶ B. Song, 'Parish Typology and the Operation of the Poor Laws in Early Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire', *Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 203-224.

By including the town of Lewes in this study it has been possible to identify further intra-regional variations in relief. For example, in the town there were more single men on the relief lists than in the rural parishes. One possible explanation might be that single men were inclined to move from a rural parish to a town where there was a wider range of work opportunities if they were struggling to support themselves. Williams similarly found more temporary relief recipients in the town of Shefford compared with the rural parish of Campton, but her work looked at just two parishes.⁷ It is also clear from this research that alterations in the size of the population in a parish need to be taken into account when assessing levels of poor relief, particularly in towns. In both Lewes and the smaller port of Newhaven there was quite a dramatic change in population during the first half of the nineteenth century which likely impacted on relief numbers.⁸

Any increase in the number of people seeking support from the relief system had an impact on the cost of relief which was funded by parish ratepayers. There was a rise in spending in all the parishes between 1800 and 1834 with a steeper, more prolonged increase in the wealden parishes. However, each parish demonstrated a slightly different pattern with peaks occurring at varying times. This once again demonstrates that communities experienced unique circumstances. Because relief was administered at parish level under the OPL, such intra-regional differences are perhaps not surprising. The true value of this detailed research is that it has been able to reveal the extent and nature of such variations so that a long-term comparison can be made between the OPL and NPL relief systems.

This study further contributes to an assessment of relief expenditure by using Feinstein's tables to allow for inflation. Prior to making an adjustment, expenditure showed an inconsistent pattern. However, when inflation is taken into account, it is clear that there is a steady upward trajectory of spending in many of the parishes which fits neatly with the increase in relief numbers (see appendix 1). It is important to note when looking at expenditure figures that when they were relatively high, such as in 1801, the poor did not necessarily receive more relief. Rather, the parish officials needed to raise additional money to cover the high cost of basic necessities and to cater for the number of people claiming relief. It is also significant that

⁷ Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 165.

⁸ The population in the parish of Lewes increased from 650 in 1801 to 1,795 in 1821 while during the early decades of the NPL the population of Newhaven increased from 904 to 1,886 as it became a railway town.

in the study parishes spending was closely linked to what was generally considered, by the overseers, to be needed at each period of rating. This supports the arguments of King and Sokoll that there could be considerable flexibility in the funding of the OPL relief system.⁹

In addition to assessing the number and profile of relief recipients and expenditure under the OPL, this thesis has considered the type of relief people were given so that once again comparisons can be made with the period following 1834. Turning firstly to outdoor relief, while there were clear intra-regional differences in the number of paupers and in expenditure in eastern Sussex, the range of support offered and the value of pensions was similar across the parishes. This matches the findings of a number of other studies which have suggested that there was considerable communication between relief officials and a sharing of practices.¹⁰ At the same time this range of relief provision, which included payments in cash and in kind, meant that local officials could be flexible in their support of parishioners. One important feature noted in this research is that in farming communities where employment was often irregular, considerable support was given to children. In the rural Weald children were sometimes taken into a workhouse or placed in-service, often in officials' households. The overseers were also paying allowances to larger families which, together with paying allowances to supplement wages, were practices that the Poor Law Commissioners wished to end. In the smaller downland parishes there are examples of a broad range of relief being given to individuals, particularly the elderly. Arguably it would have been easier for overseers to provide a bespoke package of support in a community where they were likely to know everyone.

There was greater variation in the provision of indoor relief within the eastern Sussex parishes under the OPL. The workhouse was an important component of poor relief in most of the larger wealden parishes and in Lewes for several years before the introduction of compulsory workhouse provision after 1834. However, in some of the downland parishes there were only small poorhouses. The reason for this variation may well have been the size of the parishes and

⁹ King, *Poverty and welfare*, 257; T. Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices and the Allowance Cycle', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*, 106.

¹⁰ S. Shave, *Pauper Policies: Poor Law Practice in England 1780-1850* (Manchester: 2017); S. King, 'Rights, Duties and Practice in the Transition between the Old and New Poor Laws, 1820s-1860s', in P. Jones and S. King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*.

would have been reflected in other counties.¹¹ This highlights the value of studying welfare systems in as wide a range of parishes as possible. There is evidence of harsh indoor conditions in some of the parishes in this study, notably in Hailsham in the Weald. There are also suggestions in the records that conditions had become harsher over time during the final years of the OPL. The workhouse was increasingly being presented as a deterrent by some overseers which supports the recent work of Jones and King who argue that indoor relief was being used in this way well before the NPL.¹² At the same time in the wealden parish of Uckfield the old poor house resembled a cottage with mainly elderly residents which was in stark contrast to the very large NPL workhouse.

One important finding of this study which has not been highlighted in other research is that the supply of poor relief under the OPL was in many ways erratic, particularly for those receiving less regular support such as able-bodied men. Case studies of paupers make it possible to trace the help given to individuals over several years. The form and amount of support varied, and regular relief could not be relied on. Indeed, in some parishes during the 1820s when there were attempts to impose a stricter system, outdoor relief for some individuals ended and only the workhouse was offered. This research also supports the broad agreement in the historiography that poor relief was rarely sufficient for subsistence and was therefore intended to be supplementary, given many agricultural labourers did not earn a living wage.¹³ However, on occasion an individual with a family might receive as much as £25 in one year under the OPL. The case studies show that, as King and Sokoll have suggested, people were often treated as individuals and there were instances of generous support.¹⁴

The discussion so far has emphasised the discretion that local officials had when managing poor relief and has suggested that overseers dealt with problems in their locality in their own way. However, it should be remembered that they were answerable to the parish ratepayers who funded relief. This study has broken the mould, giving sustained attention to officials under both the Old and New Poor Laws and it is also unique in exploring the relationship

¹¹ Information in the 1803 returns indicates that in most counties not all parishes had workhouses and the size of the workhouses varied considerably, *Abstract of answers and returns under act for procuring returns relative to expense and maintenance of the poor in England*, PP 1803-4, C.175.

¹² P. Jones and S. King, *Pauper Voices, Public Opinion and Workhouse Reform in Mid-Victorian England: Bearing Witness* (London: 2020), 5.

¹³ Studies which have referred to poor relief not being sufficient for subsistence include: Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief', 234; Stapleton, 'Inherited Poverty', 339-355.

¹⁴ S. King, *Poverty and welfare*, 175; T. Sokoll, 'Families, Wheat Prices', 106.

between ratepayers and relief officials. In the small downland parishes, where the same people paid the rates and administered relief through the vestry and as overseers and churchwardens, they were able to exert considerable control over parish welfare. These individuals were major tenant farmers and in some parishes there was a clear domination by individual families. A good example is the Stace family who were the main tenant farmers in the parish of Berwick and who paid 'eleven twelfths' of the rates. They appear to have administered support to most of their employees until the Swing Riots of 1830 after which they imposed a far stricter policy reducing outdoor relief and making more use of the workhouse. This illustrates how dependent many parishioners could be on the more prosperous and powerful figures in the parish.

However, in the Weald and in Lewes vestry members and officials represented a wider range of backgrounds and more people with lower incomes were being rated in the town of Lewes than in rural economies. This supports Hindle's contention that there was substantial local variation in the ability to pay poor rates based largely on the character of the local economy, and also Williams' suggestion that in urban centres in the southeast there was a broader range of ratepayers than in rural parishes.¹⁵ Yet, even in the wealden parishes and in Lewes the major landowner or tenant farmer tended to hold one of the offices of churchwarden or overseer. One unusual finding from this study is that in Chiddingly at least three overseers were women: one during the OPL period and two under the NPL. Interestingly they came from a similar background to many of the male overseers as they were the widows of prosperous farmers. What is important to bear in mind, particularly when considering the history of poverty and its contemporary relevance, is the vast disparity in wealth between many local relief officials and relief recipients. In eastern Sussex there were overseers who were large scale tenant farmers, some farming over 400 acres of land, and relief recipients who were agricultural labourers, often earning average wages of only ten to twelve shillings a week when in full employment.¹⁶

Given the dominance of certain individuals in the administration of relief under the OPL, it is important to try to gain some insight into their attitudes and the use of case studies has made this possible. The findings suggest that there was a concern and sympathy for labourers yet at the same time those in positions of authority often held strict views regarding the behaviour

¹⁵ Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 376; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*, 80.

¹⁶ East Sussex Record Office (ESRO), Tithe apportionment for the parish of Rottingdean, 1838, PAR 466/21/1/3, 1838; *Report of His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws*, 1834, C.44.

and morals of the labouring poor, opinions which were largely reflective of their time. The evidence from the Sussex parishes suggests that the poor were not becoming marginalised as proposed by Hollen Lees.¹⁷ As relief numbers and costs grew, those labourers who were struggling hard to find work and support their families became part of the 'deserving poor' in the eyes of officials. However, that relationship may well have been breaking down by the 1830s in some parishes. At Berwick it was the farmers, who had acted as relief officials for many years, who were potentially changing the relationship between those in authority and the poor. This lends weight to suggestions by Wells and Griffin that there was a worsening of relations between labourers and officials by the early-1830s.¹⁸ In parishes where there were high levels of poverty, labourers were beginning to feel that the support the parish could offer was not sufficient. The Swing Riots demonstrate that this general deterioration in the relationship between those providing relief and those in receipt of it was a regional phenomenon.¹⁹

Having set the background to the welfare systems in eastern Sussex during the final years of the OPL, the thesis then considered the intentions of policy makers in devising the PLAA. Concern over the scale of poor relief by the early-nineteenth century on the part of reformers, and a desire to impose a stricter, more regulated system, was already apparent by 1818/19 when the Sturges Bourne Acts were passed. This permissive legislation gave more power to influential parishioners who could establish a Select Vestry and appoint an assistant overseer to manage relief and set the poor to work or make more use of a deterrent workhouse. In eastern Sussex there was not a high take up of the legislation, although as noted above some policies such as making use of a deterrent workhouse were already in place in a few parishes. The scale of relief had not diminished by the 1830s and government concerns had been exacerbated by the Swing Riots. In 1834 the aim of the Poor Law Commissioners was to impose a new system on parishes which would reduce the cost of poor relief and the size of the relief lists by restricting the payment of outdoor support to the deserving poor and discouraging others, notably the able-bodied, from applying for support by only offering them the option of a place

¹⁷ L. Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: the English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: 1998), 82-111.

¹⁸ C. Griffin, *The Rural War: Captain Swing and the Politics of Protest* (Manchester: 2012); R. Wells, 'The Development of the English Rural Proletariat and Social Protest, 1770-1850' in M. Reed and R. Wells (eds.), *Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700-1880* (London: 1990).

¹⁹ The Swing Riots began in the south-eastern counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Middlesex and spread into the Home Counties and East Anglia.

in a deterrent workhouse. An individualised, flexible system managed by local overseers was supposedly to be replaced by administration by boards of guardians guided by directives from central government.

The success of the PLAA in achieving the above aims has been assessed in this study by considering the impact of the legislation on the poor and on local officials. The first stage of implementing the NPL involved setting up unions of parishes and boards of guardians and this initial phase in eastern Sussex was discussed in order to assess the immediate effect of the new legislation on parishioners during the late-1830s. The first point to note is that in eastern Sussex there was considerable continuity in office-holding following the PLAA with several OPL overseers continuing to represent their parishes as guardians. This meant that the majority of guardians in the study unions were farmers, and key employers in their parish, although in Lewes they were represented by men from a wider range of occupations. This would have enabled officials to retain a closer connection with relief recipients. Other studies of the new boards of guardians in the southeast and Midlands have also found that the rural boards were dominated by landowners and tenant farmers and a wider range of occupations were represented in the town unions.

Studies by Brundage, and Apfel and Dunkley noted a readiness on the part of the guardians in the East Midlands to adopt the Poor Law Commissioners' directives and impose a harsher system in the late-1830s.²⁰ In eastern Sussex there were intra-regional variations in the attitude of the new boards to the PLAA. Those which included members of the aristocracy were the most receptive to the new regulations while greater resistance was shown by officials in the town of Lewes. Nevertheless, the guardians in all five of the unions took a similar approach in implementing most of the commissioners' directives but resisting some measures. Union minute books and correspondence between Assistant Commissioners for the study unions provide valuable insight into the attitude of officials towards the poor. At this early stage of the PLAA the guardians demonstrated far greater understanding of the plight of the poor in their locality and a more sympathetic approach compared with officials from the Central Authority in

²⁰ A. Brundage, 'The English Poor Law of 1834 and the Cohesion of Agricultural Society', *Agricultural History*, 48 (1974), 405-417; W. Apfel and P. Dunkley, 'English Rural Society and the New Poor Laws: Bedfordshire, 1834-47', *Social History*, 10 (1985), 37-68.

London. Pleas were made by the guardians on behalf of hard-working individuals whom they regarded as 'deserving'. However, such requests fell on deaf ears as the Commissioners clearly placed the blame on being poor on the poor themselves.

Arguably the Commissioners won their argument as, despite receiving some support from local officials, many of the poor in eastern Sussex appear to have experienced a harsher system during the late-1830s based on reductions in spending and in relief numbers. However, again there were notable intra-regional variations with the PLAA having a greater impact on parishes where there had been high levels of poor relief prior to 1834. In some wealden parishes there were up to four times fewer people on the relief lists by the late-1830s and expenditure was reduced by up to two thirds. In Lewes relief numbers were more stable but expenditure was halved, possibly indicating that there were fewer regular relief recipients. In the downland parishes there was little change in the already low number of outdoor relief recipients and a far smaller drop in spending. This would suggest that the PLAA was successful in areas where, from the point of view of the Poor Law Commissioners, change was needed. In terms of the indoor poor, there were variations in the provision of workhouses both before and after the PLAA. Several parishes did not provide indoor relief prior to 1834; after the PLAA three unions built new workhouses, one greatly extended an existing building and one continued to use three OPL workhouses. During the first years of the NPL the number of indoor poor increased only slightly in parishes which had been making use of indoor relief prior to 1834, and numbers were low in parishes with new institutions. However, there was a slight increase in able-bodied labourers making use of indoor support, but largely on a very temporary basis. The regular indoor poor continued to be the elderly and children.

The profile of both outdoor and indoor relief recipients had undergone a change by the late-1830s as the outdoor poor were largely those 'deserving' poor that the OPL was originally set up to support. This had a significant impact on certain parishes; for example, in the wealden parish of Laughton several able-bodied families had received a regular pension under the OPL. These findings would again suggest that the aims of the Poor Law Commissioners were beginning to be achieved during the early stages of the PLAA and they support other studies of the early years of the PLAA which have noted a tightening of the relief system after 1834.²¹

²¹ Studies which note a tightening of the relief system after 1834 include: Williams, *Poverty, Gender*; Apfel and Dunkley, 'English Rural Society'; E. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism* (Suffolk: 2007).

Evidence from available rate books for the early NPL years also show that the PLAA was successful in reducing the pressure on rate payers as the rates went down and in some parishes the number of ratepayers increased.

Yet, there is evidence in eastern Sussex that the provision of outdoor relief to able-bodied labourers did not end altogether. The guardians were able to make use of exceptions in the prohibitory orders to make payments in cases such as illness in the family and this exceptional relief was being administered by the later 1830s. Debates in the historiography regarding the impact of the PLAA focus on whether this relief continued during the mid-nineteenth century, and to what degree. Karel Williams has argued that it was much reduced while studies such as Digby's have contended that it was quite common practice in some rural communities. These studies are based largely on government reports.²² One of the most exciting and important aspects of this study is the availability of local records for one wealden union and one downland union that provide details of exceptional relief from the late-1830s through to 1860. This has made it possible to provide new information on the extent and value of such support. Additional sources for the unions in this study include details on indoor support and ongoing correspondence between local guardians and the Commissioners during the 1840s and 1850s. It has therefore been possible to move this study beyond the 1830s to analyse the longer-term impact of the PLAA once the unions had been established.

Given the emphasis throughout this study on able-bodied labourers, consideration in this final discussion is firstly given to the impact of the PLAA on their support during the mid-nineteenth century. Records of exceptional relief payments in the Hailsham and Newhaven union boards of guardians' minute books reveal that fewer than ten able-bodied men from each parish received this form of support each week. Payments were in cash and kind; the majority of men were paid for between one and four weeks. Half of these received under one pound over a year and the majority were given less than five pounds. Therefore, while it is correct to state that outdoor relief continued for able-bodied labourers under the PLAA, in the study parishes it was given to fewer men for a shorter period of time. The support was in no way regular and the

²² K. Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); A. Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century' in D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: 1976).

value of the payments was generally lower than under the OPL. Nevertheless, exceptional relief was of some value as it provided essential medical care to families and for a few individuals from each parish it offered longer term support in cases of more severe illness or injury.

Another essential finding is that there were intra-regional differences in exceptional payments. In the wealden union only able-bodied labourers appear to have been supported and the relief was often given to help family members. In the downland union exceptional relief was given to all ages but the payments to able-bodied labourers were in nearly all cases made because the male head of household was ill. Therefore, it is possible that in the Weald the guardians regarded any form of family illness or injury as a means of providing support to labourers. This lends support to the suggestion made by Digby and Bradley that in the rural southeast guardians, who were predominantly farmers, were providing support 'ostensibly' for sickness in order to retain their workforce during slack periods in the farming season.²³

When looking at the overall picture of poor relief in the study parishes for the mid-nineteenth century, a number of observations can be made. Firstly there was no obvious increase or decrease in outdoor and indoor relief numbers and spending during the 1840s and 1850s which suggests that there was a level of stability once the initial reductions had been made in the late-1830s. There were some signs of a slight reduction in indoor numbers by 1860 in the two unions with good workhouse records, Hailsham and Newhaven, a trend also noted by Goose.²⁴ Secondly, there continued to be intra-regional differences in spending patterns and related relief numbers and differences between contiguous parishes indicating that unionisation did not bring an end to the varying circumstance of individual parishes. It is apparent that while there was certain stability in the provision of relief, in some parishes such as Hailsham and Hellingly in the Weald, and Newhaven and Rottingdean on the Downs spending slightly increased in the 1840s. This may have been for different reasons such as an increase in population in Newhaven and use of a workhouse after 1834 in Rottingdean. Thirdly, the 'deserving poor' continued to receive outdoor relief; however, the value of their cash pensions was very similar to the value under the final decades of the OPL. The nature of the NPL records

²³ Digby, 'The Rural Poor Law'; S. Bradley, 'Welcoming the New Poor Law: The Bromsgrove Poor Law Union, 1836-1847', *Family and Community History*, 22 (2019), 200-221.

²⁴ N. Goose, 'Workhouse Populations in the mid-nineteenth century: the case of Hertfordshire', *Local Population Studies*, 62 (1999), 65.

makes it difficult to assess the range of relief given to regular pensioners. They continued to receive a small cash pension and possibly their rent and some medical care, but the relief administered by a board of guardians may have been more restricted than the wider range of support provided by individual overseers under the OPL.²⁵

Turning now to the longer-term impact of the Poor Law Commissioners' policy to replace outdoor relief to able-bodied men with a deterrent workhouse, in eastern Sussex the slight increase in males over sixteen going into the workhouse noted by the late-1830s was also apparent during the 1840s and 1850s. However, an important point which is evident from the Sussex records is that the reduction in the number of able-bodied men given outdoor relief following 1834 was not matched by high numbers going into the workhouses. Numbers of able-bodied male indoor paupers were low in both the Weald and the Downs. Those men in the workhouses were predominantly agricultural labourers and many were single. Most stayed for only a few days or weeks due to unemployment, which supports the findings of other studies.²⁶

During the mid-nineteenth century the proportion of parish populations that entered the workhouse was similar across the study parishes but there were some intra-regional differences in the profile of the indoor poor with more children from large labouring families being placed in the wealden workhouses and more elderly men (which was also the case under the OPL). This supports findings from other studies and is a further indication of the problems experienced by labourers who struggled to support larger families and where hard-working conditions led to illness and vulnerability in old age.²⁷ It is important to stress that these issues which drove up relief numbers prior to 1834 were still a problem under the PLAA. The PLAA did not stop people from being poor; rather, it altered the support they could expect to receive. There were short-term fluctuations in numbers in all the unions due to factors such as bad weather and unemployment.

From the above discussion the PLAA certainly had a significant impact on the poor in eastern Sussex as fewer people received some form of outdoor support and only the deserving poor,

²⁵ The records indicate that payment of rent was discontinued after 1834.

²⁶ M. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The history of an English social institution* (London: 1981), 233; A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, 'The Populations of Two Hampshire Workhouses, 1851-1861', *Local Population Studies*, 61 (1998), 39-50.

²⁷ *ibid.* Hinde and Turnbull also noted that there were high numbers of children and elderly men in the Hampshire workhouses.

the elderly, disabled or children received any form of regular support. After 1834 there was the option of indoor support for anyone who needed it, and this raises the question: what were conditions like in the workhouses? This study has found that the experience of the indoor poor could depend on personalities of both other inmates and staff, and therefore was wide-ranging, as Alannah Tomkins has argued.²⁸ Orphan children were particularly vulnerable as they did not have the option to leave. However, there were some signs of improvements for those people who received indoor support by the late 1840s/1850s as education became more regulated and facilities for the sick were developed, although any change in workhouse establishments seemed to take a considerable time.

When improvements did occur in the study workhouses, it was often prompted by outside intervention from either locals involved in the poor relief system such as vicars or medical officers, or from Poor Law Inspectors from London. This supports the work of Jones and King who note that as the nineteenth century progressed, public interest in, and awareness of, conditions for the poor grew.²⁹ This important point leads on to a further question considered by this thesis: what impact did the PLAA have on local officials and to what extent did they maintain control over the local welfare systems? It was noted above that during the first years of the PLAA the Central Commissioners showed a far less sympathetic attitude to the poor than local guardians. However, in eastern Sussex there were signs of change as enlightened men such as Grenville Pigott were sent to inspect the provision of relief in the localities. Once Inspectors had visited individual unions and seen for themselves conditions in the workhouses, they were better placed to make more positive suggestions for improvements. Yet local officials, notably in Lewes where there had always been more resistance to the PLAA, continued to be wary of any interference from London once the PLAA was established by the mid-century. This study has been able to demonstrate the limitations of the Commissioners' authority at the local level, as on occasion the guardians in Lewes, in the Weald and on the Downs succeeded in resisting certain directives.

The records for eastern Sussex have shown that the role of the guardians broadened during the 1840s and 1850s to encompass a range of duties and that they wished to maintain control over

²⁸ A. Tomkins, 'Poor Law Institutions through Working-Class Eyes: Autobiography, Emotion, and Family Context, 1834-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 60 (2021), 285-309.

²⁹ Jones and King, *Pauper Voices*, 40.

local governance. However, it would be a mistake to view the guardians or representatives from the Central Commission as either wholly sympathetic towards the poor or lacking in empathy. While it has only been possible to gain an insight into the views of a few individuals involved in the Sussex welfare systems, this research has shown how important it is to consider officials as individuals with a range of motivations and with complex relationships with the poor. Several of the guardians exhibited a paternalistic concern for their parishioners and it has been argued in this discussion that for a number of the Sussex officials their work reflected a growing sense of civic duty. This was demonstrably the case for men who held office over an extended period of time. Continuity in office-holding appears to have been a feature of poor relief in eastern Sussex. When considering changes in the relief system, it must also be remembered that the poor were able to play their part through letters of complaint or request for change. This thesis has only been able to touch on pauper correspondence from Sussex, but the evidence supports the findings of Jones and King that the poor could have an effective voice, although once again their ability to effect any changes in the system was limited and evolved over a long period of time.³⁰

When considering Sussex's place within a broader regional context it has been clear in this discussion that there are similarities to other counties in the southeast and Midlands where increased pressure on the relief system was apparent by the final decades of the eighteenth century and where there were peaks in relief levels. What is particularly interesting about the findings from this study is that several of the Sussex parishes shared similar relief profiles with parishes from other counties, certainly during the OPL period. The profile of relief recipients in some of the wealden parishes was similar to Terling in Essex. The town economy of Lewes shared similar characteristics to towns in Bedford and Oxford. Moreover, the range of relief numbers across the Sussex parishes was similar to that in Oxfordshire.³¹ This supports King's suggestion that there were similarities in relief systems within macro-regions and it is possible to place parishes such as Laughton or Hailsham in the Weald within a similar 'welfare regime model', that of an Entitling Regime, to parishes such as Terling in Essex.³² Unfortunately the paucity of similar research makes it more difficult to compare Sussex with other regions after

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ French, 'How dependent?'; Williams, *Poverty, Gender*; Langton, 'The Geography of Poor Relief'.

³² S. King, 'Welfare regimes and welfare regions in Britain and Europe, c.1750-1860', *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), 42-66.

1834, and highlights the urgent need for more longitudinal studies such as this, although some trends, notably with indoor support, appear to be similar to other rural unions in the southeast.

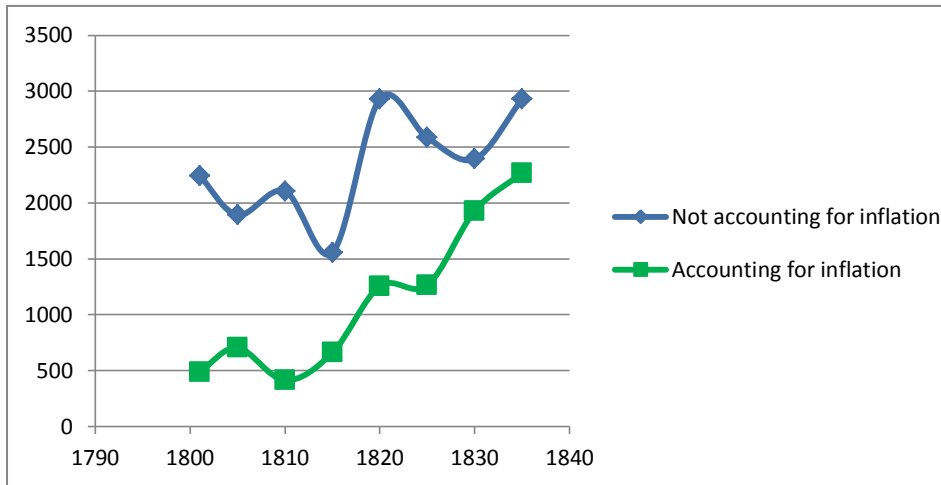
Finally, to return to the very beginning of this thesis and the words of the young woman who was struggling to pay for both food and heating, is it possible to learn lessons from the past when tackling poverty in contemporary society? Certainly, there are many similarities between nineteenth century eastern Sussex and the situation today, notably inter-regional and intra-regional variations in the causes and levels of poverty. This study has demonstrated that a government based in London is likely to lack a deep understanding of local problems and that at the very least policy makers need to spend more time getting to know the situation in localities. Local officials have a greater understanding of issues in their area and are more likely to know the people who are struggling to subsist. At the same time there is a value in enabling experts who are independent and not influenced by the need to control spending, to establish an overview of issues and contribute to local policies, just as some Poor Law Inspectors in the nineteenth century were able to suggest improvements in areas such as education and health care.

It can be argued that the Commissioners in 1834 demonstrated an ignorance of the realities of poverty and sadly modern governments still have a tendency to blame the poor for being poor. Yet, just as in the nineteenth century, many poor people today have little control over their situation due to shortages of regular employment, lack of local housing and the cost of housing, and crucially low wages which are insufficient for subsistence. There was an extreme gap between the wealthy and the poor in Sussex two hundred years ago and that situation is still apparent today. This thesis cannot propose definitive solutions to so vast and longstanding a problem, but it has demonstrated the importance of using local records from as many communities as possible to reveal localised differences in poverty. In the present, just as in the past, it is only by studying individual communities and the experiences of individuals that we can we hope to gain a better understanding of what it means to be poor.

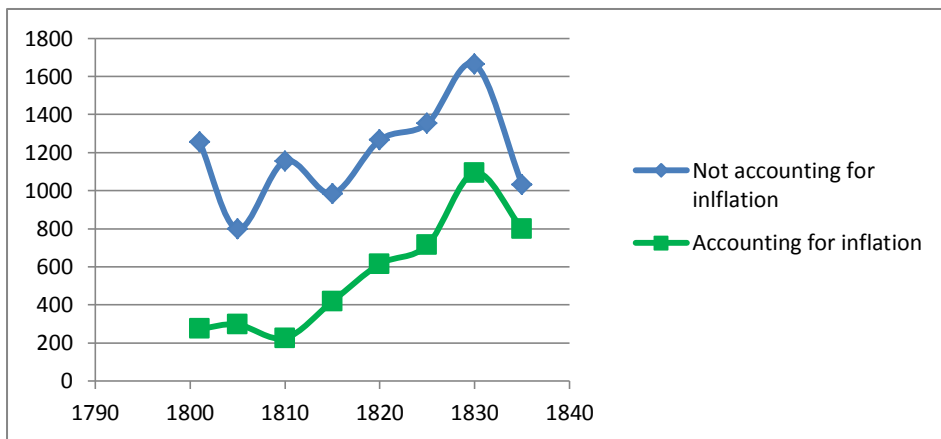
Appendix 1. Annual expenditure on disbursements in twelve of the study parishes

Wealden parishes

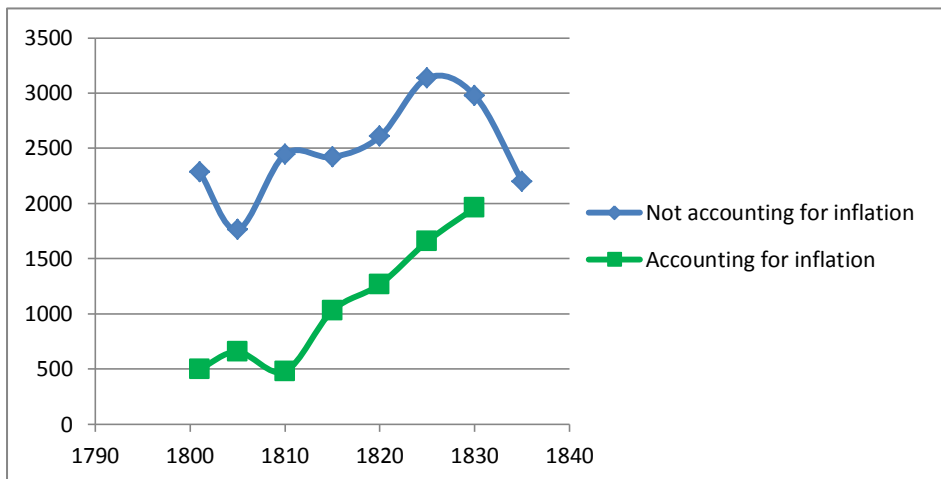
Hailsham - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



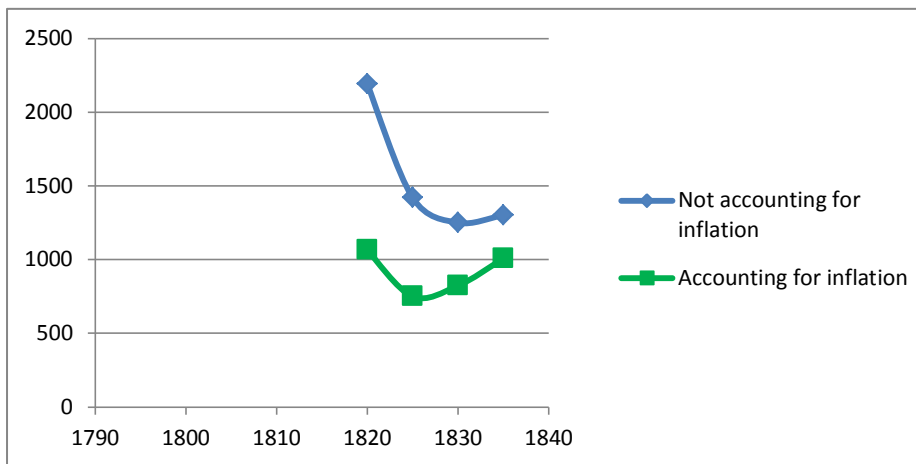
Laughton - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



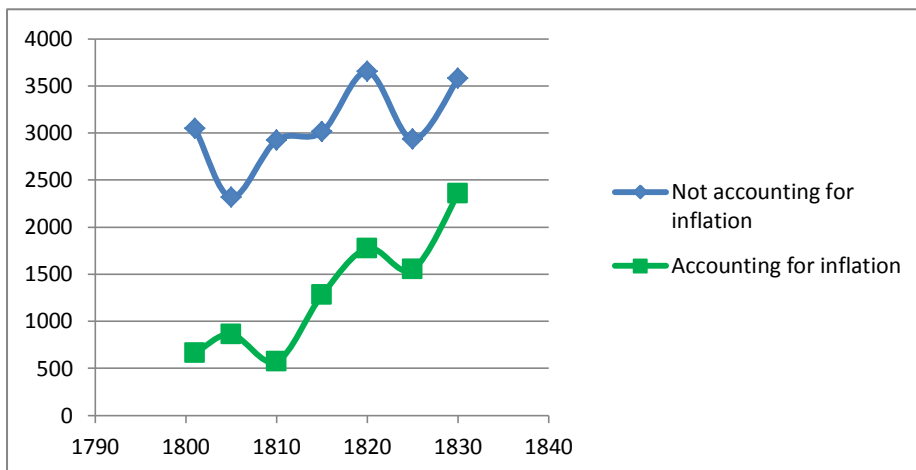
Hellingly - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



Chiddingly - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds

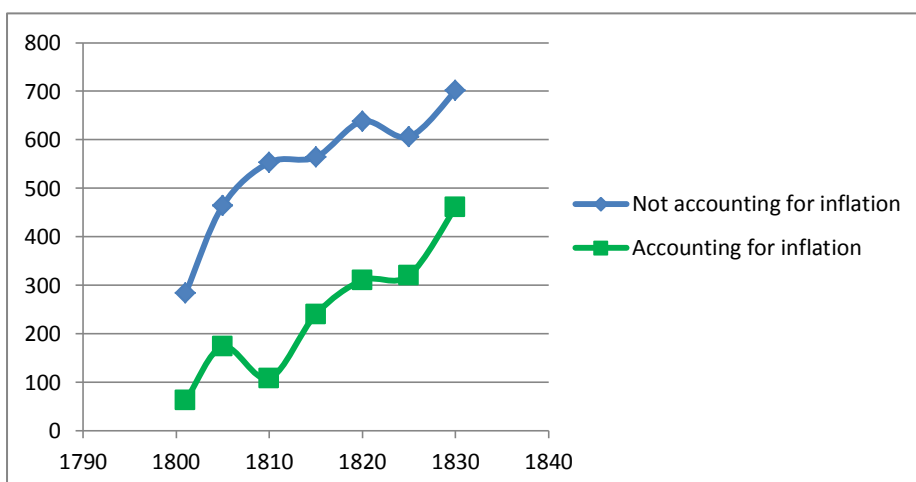


Rotherfield - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds

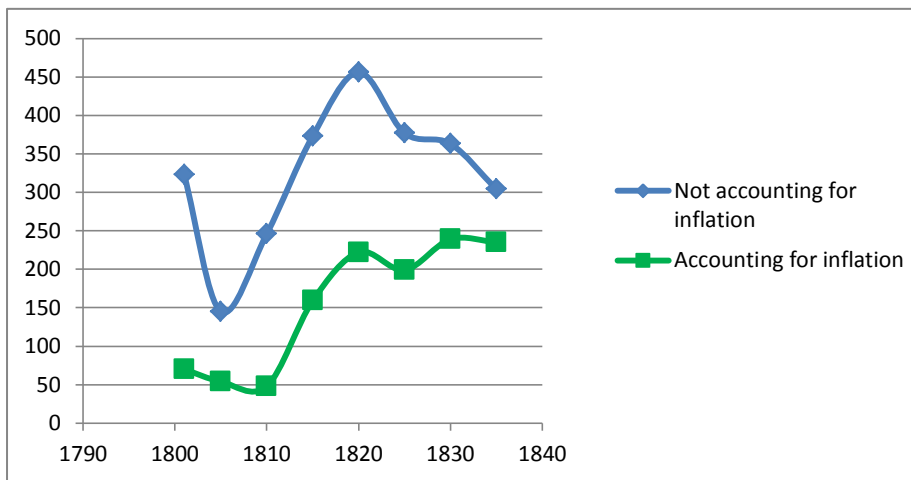


Downland parishes

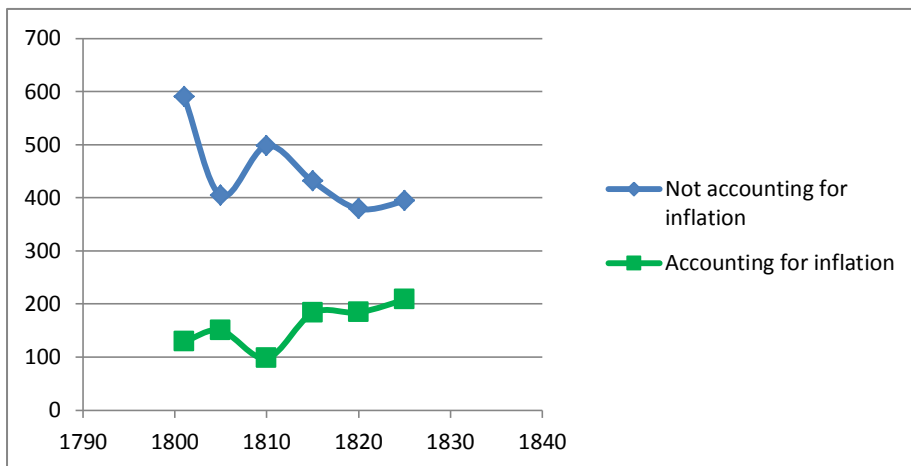
Newhaven - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



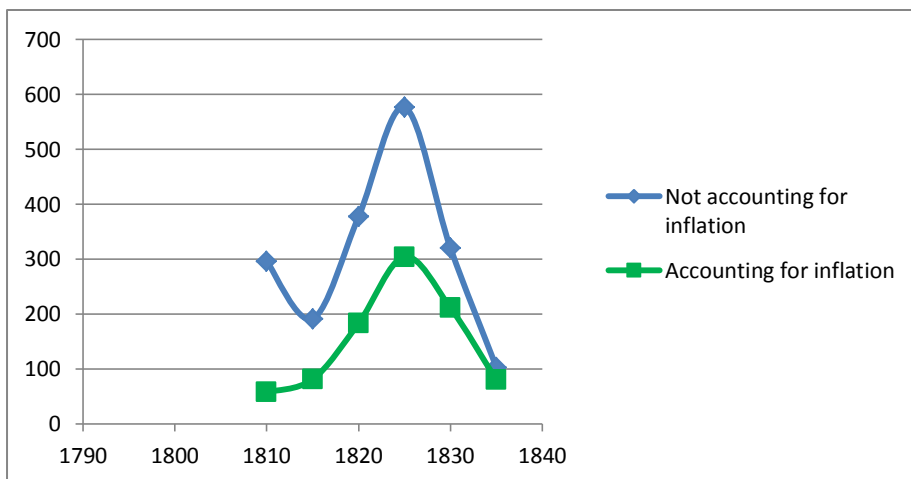
Berwick - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



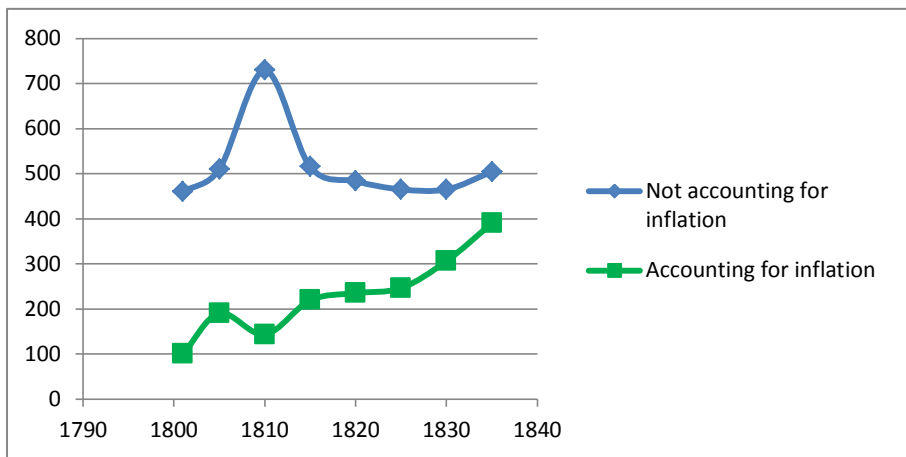
Alciston - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



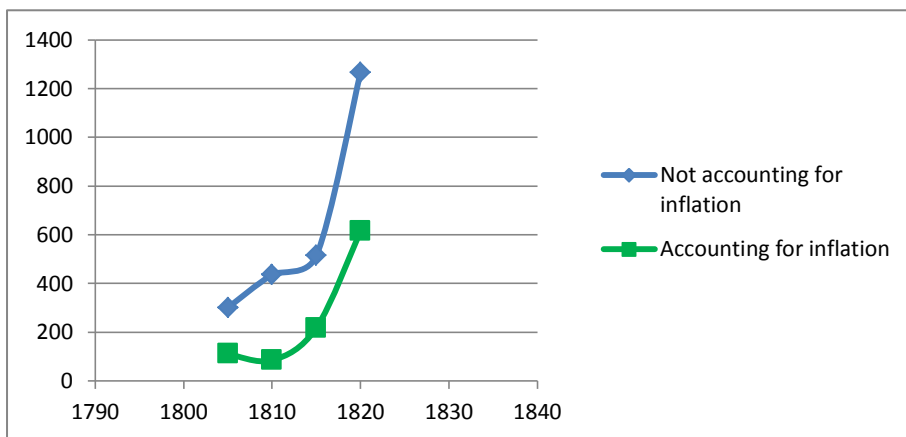
Piddinghoe - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



Rodmell - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds

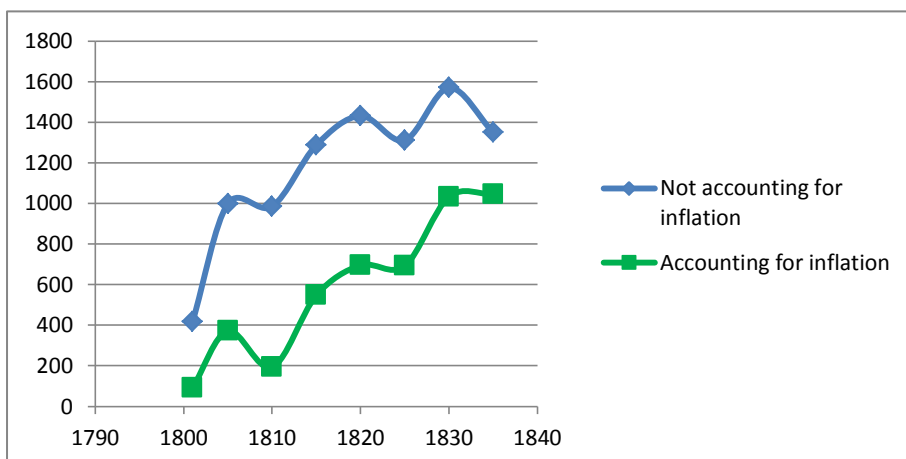


Glynde - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



Lewes

St John Sub Castro - annual expenditure on disbursements in pounds



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